



WAY OF CHOICES

BOOK 03

Mao Ni

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Way of Choices

(Ze Tian ji)

(择天记)

by

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Synopsis

To pick is to choose. This is a story about choices. Three thousand worlds full of gods and demons, with a daoist scroll in your hand, you are able to control the entire universe...

At the beginning of time, a mystical meteor came crashing down from outer space and scattered all over the world. A piece of it landed in the Eastern Continent. There were mysterious totems carved upon the meteor. Through viewing these totems, mankind comprehended the Dao and established the Orthodoxy.

Several thousand years later, the fourteen years old orphan Chen Changsheng left his master to cure his illness and change his fate. He brought a part of a marriage vow with him to the capital, thus beginning the journey of a rising hero...

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Chapter 201 – The Two Teenagers On Either Side Of The Wattled Fencing

Cheng Changsheng entered the Mausoleum of Books and did not view the Heavenly Tomes. Instead, he viewed the scenery. Nobody knew what Chen Changsheng was thinking or why he did such a thing. Actually, even he himself did not understand why he had refused to take even a single step into the Mausoleum of Books or to view any of those stone monoliths. He was only willing to walk in and look around the park below the mausoleum.

While watching the setting sun far off in the distance, his hand landed on the hilt of the short sword, and his spiritual sense gently swept over the black rock inside. Only after feeling that gentle aura did he become more aware, and he understood that viewing the scenery originally represented his hesitation. This hesitation meant he subconsciously did not want to continue cultivating.

Cultivation caused people to mature and become stronger. Only true experts could follow those instructions that the Pavilion of Ascending Mist had given him to change his fate. The only thing was..... he still had not properly begun this journey. He had already seen the bloody scenes at the end of the long journey, and these scenes had even caused his legs to become unbelievably heavy and immobile.

Previously, he would not think of such questions because everything became extremely simple while facing life and death. Only by continuing living could he have the right to think about this. However, he was currently still far away from solving this problem. Still, he had already begun thinking about another

matter. It indeed could be considered somewhat unconventional, but of course, this was a type of happiness from a different angle.

Twilight slowly grew darker, and the green mountain seemed to burn in the evening glow. He had already walked around the Mausoleum of Books once and arrived in a wooded area in the southwest corner. He saw a grass hut.

The grass hut was built very simply, and even the bark on the wooden beams could still be seen. It seemed extremely crude. He did not know when the grass on the roof was last changed. It was dark, dusty, and very unsightly.

If the examinees wanted to stay in the Mausoleum of Books for a long time, they needed to find a place to live and sleep. Chen Changsheng decided not to accept the arrangement with the other examinees because he subconsciously did not want to get too close to the green mountain and stone monoliths that he missed seeing today. He decided to look around and see if he could stay here or not.

He called out to the grass hut out of politeness, but nobody responded. After thinking for a moment, he walked up the stone steps and pushed open the door to enter. He realized that the grass hut only had a few simple furnishings. The surface of the table was covered in a shallow layer of dust, and the water tank placed behind the back door was almost empty. However, there was a lot of rice in the rice barrel.

There was probably someone who lived here, but that person lived extremely carelessly. As Chen Changsheng was slightly

mysophobic, he could not help but shake his head after seeing the house's condition. However, he did not leave. After pondering for a bit, he actually found a cloth and bucket in the corner of the room and began cleaning.

From Xining Village to the capital and from the old temple to the Orthodox Academy, he was best at cleaning the courtyard and washing clothes rather than reading. Not long afterwards, the interior of the grass hut was unbelievably clean from Chen Changsheng's scrubbing. Clear water rippled inside the water tank. There were no signs of spider webs in the house at all. Although the room was not completely different from before, it had at least reached his standard and people could live in it now.

He allowed the rice to simmer in the pot, and after cutting the salty fish that hung from the house's room, he steamed a third of it. He went into the yard, and pulled out some bok choy. He washed it and then stir-fried it. After doing these things, he carefully washed his hands. He used his handkerchief to dry his hands completely before sitting down on the stone steps. Once again, he began to stare blankly at the scenery.

Twilight slowly disappeared, and the Mausoleum of Books slowly grew dark. The scenery was not as pleasant as before, but people felt a more mysterious feeling. Those green mountain woods turned into inky blobs, which resembled a few characters.

Several thousand years ago, a Demon Lord had studied the Dao inside the Mausoleum of Books for ten years. In those days, Zhou Dufu used three days and three nights to completely comprehend all of the stone monoliths, thereby reaching the top of the

mausoleum. There were very many stories like these in the history of the mausoleum, almost too numerous to count. This was because it had always been a legendary holy ground.

Thinking of these stories and legends or that number one divine general of the continent who had stayed in the pavilion for hundreds of years, Chen Changsheng felt slightly moved. His eyes grew darker and darker due to the color of the night.

“Yearning and reverence are all very normal, but..... you are only looking at it one way, and you are doing absolutely nothing. In my opinion, this is extremely stupid.....and you are wasting your life.”

A voice entered from outside the tattered wattled fencing of the grass hut. That person spoke very slowly, and he did not have any obvious fluctuation in his voice. It sounded like a boring record.

Chen Changsheng turned his head around to take a look and only saw a teenager standing outside the wattled fencing. The teenager was very skinny and did not have any expression on his face. He seemed very apathetic, just like his plain eyebrows.

It was the teenager of the Wolf Tribe, Zhexiu.

Chen Changsheng knew that Zhexiu had earned enough army merits in the northern borders to easily obtain the right to enter the Mausoleum of Books. However, he had waited many days at the Orthodox Academy for Chen Changsheng who had never appeared. Instead, he had recently entered the mausoleum with

the examinees of the top three grades from the Grand Examination, so inevitably, this was some kind of coincidence.

He clasped his hand to greet the teenager outside the wattled fencing and said after thinking, "Listening to songs, watching dramas, and reading novels, aren't there actually many people who are wasting their lives? I also really want to experience such a feeling."

"But you..... aren't that kind of person." Zhexiu looked at him and spoke with the wattled fencing separating them. His voice was still dry and awkward, but it was very certain almost unquestionable.

Chen Changsheng stayed silent and only replied after a little while, "I have some things that I still cannot make sense of. And before I can understand them, I temporarily do not want to do anything. At the very least, I do not want to do anything today."

He had only met Zhexiu at the Grand Examination, so he was not too familiar with him. Also, his first impression of the Wolf Tribe teenager was an extremely dangerous and very vigilant character. However, when twilight had swallowed the Mausoleum of Books today, he suddenly found that this Wolf Tribe teenager seemed to be able to understand his own bewilderment for some unknown reason. Perhaps, it was due to the brutality of the northern plains' extremely windy and snowy weather or the rumors regarding this teenager.

"Is living really the most important thing?" He looked at Zhexiu and asked him seriously.

A fifteen-year-old teenager asked his peer a question concerning life or death. It seemed like an extremely philosophical question, and he would definitely be laughed at by people if it were asked in the capital's academies.

However, Zhexiu was not a normal teenager, so he did not laugh at Chen Changsheng. Instead, he stayed silent for a very long time. Only after thinking very seriously about the question did he give his reply.

“Living is not the most important thing.”

In the snowy and windy northern borders, living was an extremely difficult thing. It was even more difficult to survive for a mix-blooded young wolf who had been exiled from his tribe since his youth. Zhexiu had managed to survive at all costs, and had done countless cold-blooded things to survive. However, he did not believe that living was the most important thing.

This answer was somewhat shocking.

Chen Changsheng ruminated deeply and said, “Thank you.”

From outside the wattled fencing, Zhexiu replied, “Don't mention it.”

Chen Changsheng then asked, “Then, what is the most important thing to you?”

Zhexiu said, “Living soberly, or dying soberly.”

Just at this moment, there was a creaking noise in front of the grass hut. The wattled fencing was pushed open to reveal a hole, and a male walked in. The male had messy hair and a dirty face, and his clothes were old and shabby. However, he did not seem too old, and a pair of bright and clean eyes could be seen from within his untied hair. He looked at the two teenagers who stood on opposite sides of the wattled walls, and he looked like he wanted to ask something. However, he did not end up asking anything due to some unknown reason.

Silence descended upon both the inside and the outside of the wattled fencing. This silence was somewhat strange.

Chapter 202 – Tide Rush Of Blood

The man turned around and entered the grass hut. After noticing that the floor and furnishings had been cleaned spotlessly, he fell silent for a while. Afterwards, a fragrance filled his nose, and he found the rice and salted fish that had just been cooked. Also, he saw the basket full of bok choy on the kitchen table. He used his hand to comb the messy hair in front of his eyes away and turned around to look at Chen Changsheng. However, he did not say anything.

Chen Changsheng guessed that this disheveled man was the owner of this grass hut. He walked up and grabbed a piece of pork skin that he had already prepared beforehand, and he rubbed it on the hot metal pot. Afterwards, he threw the bok choy into the pot and cooked the vegetables in no time. This was accompanied by the movement of the spatula and a series of sizzling sounds.

After serving the bok choy onto a plate, it was not very fragrant due to the lack of oil, and it also did not have a nice look. However, when Chen Changsheng ate, he had always paid particular attention to less oil and salt. When he still lived in Xining Village, he would often just eat boiled bok choy, so he did not feel that this was inappropriate to eat. Afterwards, Chen Changsheng cut the steamed pieces of salted fish into parts, sprinkled some thinly sliced scallions over it, and started serving it as well.

The steaming white rice was placed on the table. The man took up his chopsticks and began eating without a hint of politeness. Chen Changsheng served himself a bowl of rice, but after turning around, he discovered that there was actually an additional person at the table. He did not know when Zhexiu had walked over from

the other side of the wattled fencing. Zhexiu sat on the chair expressionlessly, and the message he conveyed was extremely clear.

Chen Changsheng shook his head helplessly and placed the bowl of rice in front of him. He then began to serve the third bowl of rice.

There was not much bok choy, and it was finished off with just a few chopstickfuls. The salted fish was very salty, and it went extremely well with the rice. However, just like what Tang Thirty-Six had said about Zhexiu at the Grand Examination, Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu both ate at a very slow pace. When they were still eating their first bowl of rice, that man had already finished four bowls and placed his chopsticks down.

Chen Changsheng poured a cup of tea and passed it to that person.

Zhexiu glanced at him but did not say anything.

The man rubbed his belly in a satisfied manner as he drank the tea. He produced a very inelegant belch.

From start to end, these three people had not spoken a single word. The meal was very quiet, and the atmosphere was very weird.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu finished eating at almost the same

time. Zhexiu stood up and began clearing the bowls and chopsticks. He began to boil water and wash the dishes. While watching this happen, Chen Changsheng thought to himself but did not fight over it with him. He poured tea into another two bowls.

After washing the bowls, Zhexiu casually dried his hands on the front of his clothes. Sitting back at the table, he lifted up his own bowl of tea and finished all of it in one go. Afterwards, he looked at Chen Changsheng and said, “You still owe me something.”

When he had said that, he did not even glance at the man who currently had his eyes closed and was resting. It was as if that person did not even exist at all.

Chen Changsheng said, “I know. I have been continuously waiting at the Orthodox Academy the past few days for you to come over.”

“I already have enough money. The payment Tang Tang gave was very generous.”

Zhexiu looked at the remaining spoilt tea in his bowl and remained silent for a while. Afterwards, he said, “I need you to help me with something.”

Chen Changsheng said, “Speak. If I can help, I will definitely help you.”

During the Dueling Stage of the Grand Examination, Tang Thirty-Six represented the Orthodox Academy and formed an agreement to work together with this Wolf Tribe teenager. In the following Dueling Stage processes, Zhexiu followed this agreement very resolutely, especially in that battle with Gou Hanshi. The battle lasted for a very, very long time. He made a very large contribution to Chen Changsheng obtaining first upon the First Banner.

Zhexiu raised his head and stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes. He said expressionlessly, "I have problems with my meridians."

Actually, Chen Changsheng had already guessed what Zhexiu needed help with, so he was not surprised when he heard what was said. He asked, "Are you sure I can help you?"

"If you can help Her Highness Luoluo, then you might be able to help me, even if it is only a possibility," Zhexiu said.

In the later generations of offspring from the marriage between the Fae and human race, there were often problems that occurred with the fusion of the two different bloodlines. There was a chance that a genius would be born, as well as a huge chance that a cripple would be born. Even for the later generations with better bloodline talent, their bodies would often also have many dangerous problems internally. Since the bloodlines of Luoluo's parents were too powerful, the problem was relatively easier to deal with. However, Zhexiu was not so lucky.

Not only did problems with his meridians affect his cultivation, the scariest part was that it had affected his resolutions and even

his life.

“When the outbreak occurs, it is very painful. In the most severe cases, I will lose all rationality. Rather, speaking more accurately, I will go crazy. I don’t know what I will do after I go crazy, perhaps, I will randomly kill people. Otherwise, I would not be abandoned or kicked out by my tribe when I was young.”

Zhexiu spoke apathetically, as if he were speaking about other people’s affairs. There was no change in his expression at all.

Only now did Chen Changsheng understand why Zhexiu had said before that living or dying soberly was the most important thing outside the wattled fencing.

He thought for a very long time and said, “The likeliest cause is that the meridians connected to your sea of conscious have problems and are somewhat deformed.”

Since his own meridians were broken, he had always studied information regarding meridians within the Daoist Canons. After researching this for a very long time, very few people knew more than him when talking about problems with meridians. Afterwards, when he had instructed Luoluo and Xuanyuan Po, his experience actually grew extremely rich. Therefore, when Zhexiu finished sharing about his own situation at the time, he understood where the problems were very quickly.

Zhexiu did not seem excited from seeing a sliver of hope and said expressionlessly, “The Council of Divine Ordinance also said

something similar.”

Chen Changsheng looked at him and asked after thinking a little, “How do you want me to treat you?”

“To live a little longer is obviously the best. However, if that is impossible, then at least promise me that I can always stay sober. Living or dying soberly. So long as I am sober, that is enough.”

Zhexiu stared at him in the eyes and said, “I don’t want to live without knowing anything. Living muddle-headedly and living obliviously is living just like a dog.”

He was a lonesome but proud wolf. He would walk thousands of li to eat meat and was unwilling to eat sh*t.

“I cannot guarantee anything, but I will try my best to find a way.”

Chen Changsheng spoke before extending his hand to help feel Zhexiu’s pulse.

His forefinger and middle finger were together, just like two swords of different lengths. They were placed gently over Zhexiu’s pulse. It was just like a frame that exhibited weaponry. They seemed to be very casually placed, but they were actually very sturdily placed.

lub-dub. lub-dub. lub-dub. lub-dub.

His fingers could feel a distinct pulse. Chen Changsheng discovered that this Wolf Tribe teenager was the same as Luoluo. His heart rate was extremely fast, just like the continuous beating sound of a war drum. Also, his heartbeat was abnormally strong. His skin was like the light, stretchy skin of a drum, slightly vibrating constantly. It had even caused his fingers to become slightly numb.

Suddenly, a type of power burst forth from Zhexiu's pulse. This increase in power was not sharp nor forceful, just like the rising tide. However, it was extremely sudden, as if the tide had completely submerged the rocks at sea in a flash. Chen Changsheng was not prepared for this at all, and his two fingers were forcefully pushed away.

He looked at Zhexiu in shock. However, Zhexiu still had not revealed any expression, and he was still very apathetic. However, there was a change in one detail — the light within his pupils became very gloomy.

What was going on?

Chapter 203 – [Snow-Treading Xun Mei](#)

TL: The name of the chapter (踏雪荀梅) is actually a pun of an idiom (踏雪寻梅). They are read the same (tà xue xún méi), and the idiom means “to walk in the snow to view the flowering plum”

The power that was transmitted from Zhexiu’s pulse was very strong like a flood that had broken through the rock blockade of a river. It subsided with a howl and rose in a gush. Chen Changsheng could imagine the amount of damage and pain this type of power brought to Zhexiu. However, Zhexiu’s expression remained unchanged, which meant that he had tolerated this type of pain all year round or even at all times. He had even become numb to it, but his eyes would still become gloomy. This meant that even though he had already acclimated to it, he was still unable to completely ignore this kind of pain. This kind of pain really seemed to be extremely scary.

Chen Changsheng stayed silent for a while before placing his fingers over Zhexiu’s pulse once again. This time, he channeled some true essence into it— He was somewhat lacking confidence in his own judgment. He was unsure whether Zhexiu’s problems with his meridians were severe or not, as he could not imagine how a person could withstand such pain and still live for so many years.

The grass hut became extremely quiet underneath the twilight. The oil lamps were not lit, and he focused on observing Zhexiu’s expression. Chen Changsheng only saw two eyes that were filled with feelings of stubbornness and perseverance. He waited diligently and did not miss any sudden changes in pulse. However, when that had time arrived, he was still thrown off guard.

With a soft pop, Chen Changsheng's fingers were once again knocked away.

This time under the dual observation of true essence and spiritual sense, he had gained an even more precise understanding of the weird activities in Zhexiu's meridians. He had some vague ideas in his mind, and his heart began to feel heavy from it. His eyebrows became tightly furrowed unknowingly. What exactly was the problem with that turbulent, tide-like shaking?

He pulled back his right arm and looked at Zhexiu. He did not know what to say.

Zhexiu's expression remained the same as before, but his face was closer. Therefore, he could see that Zhexiu's hair was vaguely soaked, glimmering from the reflected starlight that shone into the grass hut. It was early spring and only slightly cold. He was a teenager with such strong willpower that even in front of the Mausoleum of Books, he would not change his expression. However, he currently had sweat profusely. One could only imagine how difficult it was to bear with such pain.

At this moment, Zhexiu opened his mouth and said while looked at Chen Changsheng, "I never actually thought that your true essence would be so weak."

Chen Changsheng had totally never thought that at this time, what he cared most about was not his own illness but such matters.

“Yes, it is too weak.”

A voice appeared from the side of the table. It came from the man whom Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had almost forgotten was sitting there.

After that man pushed his messy hair behind his ear, his gaze moved from Chen Changsheng's body to Zhexiu's. He said, “Tide Rush of Blood. You are actually not dead yet?”

Chen Changsheng stayed silent. He knew that the Daoist Canons had these four words written in it, but it was Zhexiu's problem.

There were no changes in Zhexiu's expression. Four years ago, when Elder Tianji helped him diagnose the illness, he had also spoken in such a manner.”

“I won't die.” He said while looking at that middle-aged man.

The slow speech of the teenager was abnormally forceful like the rubbing between two rocks. It was also like a sword cutting through bone. It was extremely definite.

That man shook his head and no longer paid any more attention. He stood up from the table and walked to the side of the bed. He collapsed directly onto it.

Originally, Chen Changsheng had wanted to speak with him about the matter of staying over for the night. However, he had

never thought that in the next moment, he would hear a snoring sound from the bed, so he naturally could not mention it.

The snores echoed through the grass hut like thunder. What he did not understand was what the man did during the day to become this tired. He signaled to Zhexiu to walk out of the hut with him. They arrived in the sparse, small yard surrounded by wattled fencing. After borrowing the starlight, he looked at Zhexiu and paused to speak again.

“Even the Council of Divine Ordinance cannot treat me, but you might be able to treat me.”

Zhexiu said slowly as he looked at him. His tone could not be considered as rude, but the contents of what he had said was actually rather rude.

What Chen Changsheng wanted to see was all blocked by this sentence, so he could only stay silent. He stared into the distance at the Mausoleum of Books, which was like a black mountain and sighed quietly with emotion, “Fate indeed is unfair.”

Zhexiu said, “Fate gave me a powerful bloodline talent, which also brought along pain that was hard to live with and a gloomy future. When I look at it, it is very fair.”

Chen Changsheng said, “But you had no choice, nor could you deny the powerful bloodline, nor at the same time, could you deny such pain. I still believe it is unfair.”

Zhexiu stayed silent for a while before saying, “Yes, it was never fair.”

Perhaps, it was due to their extremely similar circumstances that closely afflicted people empathized with one another, but Chen Changsheng’s impression towards Zhexiu underwent a very large change. He had learnt that under the seemingly cold outward appearance, this Wolf Tribe teenager had hidden a lot of pain and unwillingness. Unwilling to let his mental state remain so cold, he said, “But there might be something counterbalancing fairness, such as us entering the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths. We will have to rely on ourselves for whatever we can comprehend.”

“The Mausoleum of Books is the unfairest thing.”

Zhexiu looked at the mausoleum under the starlight and said expressionlessly, “On what basis should humans be allowed to determine the rules to enter the Mausoleum of Books? On what basis is the demon race not allowed to see the Heavenly Tomes?”

Chen Changsheng had never thought that he who had killed an unknown number of members of the demon race would actually help the demon race cry out against injustice. He could not help but stare blankly.

“I am not crying out against injustice for the demon race. I am only questioning what is fair.” Zhexiu said, “Those stone monoliths within the Mausoleum of Books are actually no different from pieces of leftover deer leg. They are all meat, and everybody wants to eat those pieces of meat. Also, they are all greedy.

However, only the strongest people can have the right to distribute parts of this meat.”

Chen Changsheng asked, “So you want to become even stronger?”

Zhexiu said, “No, I want to become stronger not because I want to distribute meat, but because I just want to eat meat.”

Chen Changsheng thought about it and was about to say something. Just at this moment, a shout was suddenly raised from far away in the night.

“Where are you? Chen Changsheng, you b*stard where are you?”

After hearing this voice, Chen Changsheng could not help but sigh. Even Zhexiu’s expression underwent some change——In the Grand Examination, this voice’s owner had left too deep of an impression onto him.

“I am here, Thirty-Six, I am just right here.” Chen Changsheng yelled into the woods at night.

The Mausoleum of Books was a holy ground, and it was extremely sacred and solemn. People who walked in it would often all hold their breath or lower the sound of their breathing. During the day, the mausoleum park was extremely quiet, but at night, there were suddenly two teenagers shouting aloud, flooding it with noise instead. Only after yelling did Chen Changsheng realize this,

and he could not help but feel very embarrassed.

Accompanying the rustling sounds between his clothes and branches, Tang Thirty-Six found his way and pushed over the six or seven-foot tall wattled fencing with a single push. After arriving in front of Chen Changsheng, he heavily pat his shoulder, and said with lingering fear that was hard to extinguish, “I was really worried that the problem with your mind had not been fixed and that you had directly left the Mausoleum of Books. Luckily, you haven’t.”

Chen Changsheng was somewhat helpless and said, “Could you not yell so loudly? The Mutual Response of the Fisherman’s Song is a sword technique from the Lishan Sword Sect.”

Tang Thirty-Six said boldly and straightforwardly, “This place is so large, and yet the government hasn’t even installed a sound projecting array. Also, those Monolith Guardians aren’t servants, so they can’t be ordered around. Other than yelling, how else can I find people?”

What he had said made a lot of sense, so Chen Changsheng actually could not rebuke him in any way.

Just at this moment, Zhexiu said expressionlessly, “After entering the Mausoleum of Books, everybody will make best use of their time to view the monoliths and comprehend the Dao. Who will be like you, yelling out to friends like you haven’t forgotten anything?”

“Hmm, is it actually you?”

Only now did Tang Thirty-Six notice Zhexiu. After being vaguely startled, he walked up enthusiastically and said as he reached for his hands, “You have finally arrived. Have you come for your debt?”

Zhexiu was not used to this type of close interaction, so he took a step back and dodged his hands.

Tang Thirty-Six retracted his hands very naturally and then heavily pat Chen Chengsheng’s shoulders. He said, “If you can resolve the debt, then quickly resolve it.”

Chen Changsheng rubbed his shoulder. He thought that if he had not undergone perfect Purification under the Black Dragon Pond for some reason, perhaps, his shoulder really would have been broken today by Tang Thirty-Six. He said, “I will try, but I lack confidence.”

Just at this moment, that man walked out from the grass hut. His loose and messy hair covered up the fatigue on his face.

Chen Changsheng bowed and asked, “Senior, why do you not rest a little longer?”

That man looked at Tang Thirty-Six and said, “Too noisy.”

“Sorry, my friend came to find me. He is in a bit of a cheerful

mood.” Chen Changsheng apologized and then introduced him to Tang Thirty-Six, “This senior is the owner of the grass hut. I thought that since I have to stay in the Mausoleum of Books for a month, I cannot live out in the open. It is bad for the body, so I wanted to ask for lodging...”

He minded his own business and spoke continuously until he noticed that Tang Thirty-Six was not listening to him at all. Instead, he was staring blankly at that man.

That man tied up his messy hair, which revealed his face. This was also the first time Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had seen his full appearance. They only saw that this person was handsome, and he had eyes that carried a hint of coldness. However, this did not give people a cold-blooded feeling, but rather a clean feeling although he was not truly clean.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at that man’s face, and his expression became a little weird. He seemed slightly bewildered, and afterwards, he seemed to remember something. His eyes suddenly glimmered and said with astonishment, “You... you are.... You are Xun Mei.”

That man was slightly startled. He stared at Tang Thirty-Six and stayed silent for a very long time before speaking plainly, “Correct, I am Xun Mei. Who would have thought that there are still people who remember me.”

After hearing these two words, Xun Mei, Zhexiu raised his eyebrow slightly. It was very obvious that he was also remembered the identity of this person. Only Chen Changsheng still did not

know.

“How can anybody not remember Senior Snow-Treading Xun Mei?” Tang Thirty-Six looked at the middle-aged man called Xun Mei and said with astonishment, “The rumors say that ever since after the Grand Examination that year, senior has always stayed within the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths and comprehend the Dao. Who would have thought that it was actually true.”

Xun Mei looked at the indistinct lights within the mausoleum. He revealed a slight disappointment and said, “So the Grand Examination this year has already ended. No wonder so many people appeared today.”

“Yes senior, today is the first day the top three grades of the Grand Examination have entered the mausoleum.”

Tang Thirty-Six thought of something and pulled Chen Changsheng in front of him. He said proudly, “This is my friend Chen Changsheng. He is the same as senior years ago and has also placed first upon the first banner.

“Oh? What academy are you from?” Xun Mei asked.

Tang Thirty-Six said, “Orthodox Academy.”

Xun Mei nodded and said, “It is common after all for geniuses to come out from under the Banyan tree.”

Hearing what was said, Chen Changsheng was slightly startled. He thought that when people normally heard that the Orthodox Academy was revived, they would always be slightly surprised. But this senior....only after thinking about it again did he suddenly fully realize that this senior did not know about the great calamity that had occurred to the Orthodox Academy a dozen years ago. Wouldn't it be saying that this person had already stayed in the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths for at least a dozen years and had never left?

Tang Thirty-Six said to him, "Senior Xun Mei obtained first place upon the first banner in the Grand Examination thirty-seven years ago."

Chen Changsheng was very surprised and thought to himself wouldn't that mean this senior had already stayed within the Mausoleum of Books for thirty-seven years?

Chapter 204 – [Wang Po Of Tianliang](#)

TL: The name of the chapter (天凉王破) refers to a person, but at the same time, it is also an idiom that is often used on Chinese social media. It basically describes someone so powerful that when the weather grows cold (凉) and he dislikes it, he can cause the Wang (王) Corporation to go bankrupt (破).

Xun Mei looked at Chen Changsheng and said while shaking his head, “Is it only your true essence that is actually weak, such that you were still able to place first upon the First Banner? It really is getting worse and worse with each generation.”

Everybody knew that the Grand Examination this year was a high, and the competition was much intenser than the past years. Chen Changsheng did not react, but Tang Thirty-Six could not agree.

“Even if it was the Council of Divine Ordinance analyzing it, this year’s Grand Examination was much tougher than senior’s year.” He said.

Xun Mei’s expression suddenly became somewhat lonely, and said, “I don’t know who participated this year, but in my year..... two people did not participate.”

Tang Thirty-Six was slightly surprised and remembered the two names that were once placed with Xun Mei’s name. He could not help but admit what Xun Mei had said was reasonable.

If those two people competed in the previous Grand

Examination, then even if Qiushan Jun and Xu Yourong had participated, this year's Grand Competition could still not be compared to the previous one.

After sharing this, Xun Mei's mood was obviously slightly shaken, and he no longer paid any attention to the three teenagers. He walked to a rock within the yard and sat down. He began to stare blankly at the Mausoleum of Books.

Chen Changsheng looked at this senior's back and sighed slightly with emotion. In the daytime, Tang Thirty-Six had shared with him that some cultivators would stay in the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths for many years. Who would have thought that he could personally meet one so quickly. Specifically, this person had stayed in the mausoleum for thirty-seven years and had not taken a single step outside. It was obvious that he had some things he wanted to hide.

After thinking up until this point, he felt that the senior's shadow became rather miserable. He did not have the heart to disturb him again and extended a hand to stop Tang Thirty-Six from continuing to ask questions.

Tang Thirty-Six's expression changed slightly and asked, "What?"

Chen Changsheng looked at him and asked seriously, "Have you eaten?"

Only now did Tang Thirty-Six remember this important matter,

and he felt hunger that struck him like a tidal wave. He hugged his stomach and weakly said, “No.”

Chen Changsheng brought him into the hut and served up the leftover salted fish. He then added hot tea to a bowl of leftover rice and said, “There is no more bok choy, so just make do and eat some of this.”

“Can this be eaten? Can this be eaten? What do you mean make do? There’s no more bok choy, so you let me use tea leaves to fake it? What type of taste will that have?”

Tang Thirty-Six used the chopsticks to pick up a tea leaf that had been soaked black. He said irritably.

Chen Changsheng ignored him and used the starlight to find the oil lamp. After rubbing it carefully, he lit the wick, and the dim light illuminated the interior of the hut.

The side of the table was also illuminated. Tang Thirty-Six buried his head into the bowl and ate without stopping. Many fishbones had already appeared in front of the bowl.

After seeing this, Chen Changsheng could not help but wonder what those young ladies who loved Tang Thirty-Six within the academies of the capitals would think if they saw his eating manners?

Zhexiu naturally would not observe Tang Thirty-Six’s eating. He

looked at Xun Mei who sat outside on the rock and said, “Who would have thought that the rumors were true.”

Chen Changsheng said, “According to what Tang Thirty-Six had said, there should be more people like this within the mausoleum.”

Tang Thirty-Six took time off from busily eating and raised his head to say something, “But there are not a lot of well known people like Xun Mei. “

Zhexiu said, “Many people believe that he had already died.....To view the monoliths within the mausoleum for thirty odd years is really hard to imagine.”

Tang Thirty-Six pulled out a handkerchief from his sleeves slightly unfamiliarly and carefully wiped his mouth under Chen Changsheng’s gaze. He said, “He is unwilling to part with the mausoleum.”

Zhexiu thought about those stories from years ago and said while shaking his head, “Instead, I feel like he is afraid of leaving.”

Tang Thirty-Six stared blankly and said while shaking his head, “It is inappropriate saying it like that. At most, he is just embarrassed to leave.”

Unwilling, afraid, and embarrassed were all words that were unpleasant to hear.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat surprised and thought that since this senior called Xun Mei had obtained first place upon the First Banner in the Grand Examination thirty-seven years ago, then he definitely was not a normal person. How had he fallen from grace to receive such an assessment?

“Senior Xun Mei’s most well-known trait is that his willpower for cultivation is extremely firm and persistent. When he was seven, he stood outside Mr. Yunshan’s door in the snow for three days and three nights. Only after that was he taken in as a disciple.”

Tang Thirty-Six said, “This was where the four words, Snow-treading Xun Mei, came from.”

Chen Changsheng asked, “Mr. Yunshan?”

“Mr. Yunshan is the teacher of principal Mao Qiuyu”

Tang Thirty-Six looked at Chen Changsheng, and said, “If you are correct, then Xun Mei is Principal Mao’s youngest junior.”

Mao Qiuyu was one of the few current day experts of the continent, so one could only imagine what kind of level his youngest junior was at. Also, his youngest junior carried a special type of meaning within the word youngest——The youngest junior was definitely the final disciple, and only people who had extremely excellent talent could be accepted as the final disciple of a sect or an academy.

For example, the legendary Junior Martial Uncle of Li Mountain or the current Qi Jian.

“Xun Mei was Heavenly Academy’s most outstanding student back then, and he held a position that was much higher in the Heavenly Academy than the current day Zhuang Huanyu. Hey, speaking of which, shouldn’t we call Zhuang Huanyu here after entering the mausoleum? Xun Mei is his great senior of the Heavenly Academy. Let’s see him kowtow to Xun Mei. It will be extremely good. Also, speaking of which, if we didn’t go to the Orthodox Academy, then wouldn’t we also have to kowtow to him? What a dangerous thing.” Tang Thirty-Six said with a great smile, but then he realized Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu were not interested in what was said. He could not help but say slightly annoyedly, “Just one person in the world who is as boring as you is enough for it to be depressing. Why must there be two? And why must the two of you meet? It really causes people to be depressed.”

Chen Changsheng ignored him and asked Zhexiu, “Why is Xun Mei afraid to leave the mausoleum?”

Before Zhexiu could say anything, Tang Thirty-Six had already started speak, “Then, it can be considered that you have asked the right person. No matter how you say it, I have stayed in the Heavenly Academy for half-a-year after all, so I understand this matter better than all of you. Back then, Xun Mei was the pride of the Heavenly Academy. His talent was very astonishing, but unfortunately, there were people who had even better talent than him in his age group and were even more outstanding.”

Tang Thirty-Six’s expression suddenly became serious, and he

said, “The most unfortunate thing of Xun Mei’s whole life was that he was born in the same year as Wang Po of Tianliang. Since he was twelve, he would often meet him in various gatherings of academies and sects. They fought at least a hundred times, and every time, Xun Mei always lost. And in the Grand Gathering of Zhushi one year, Xun Mei actually lost three times in a row.

After living for one year in the capital, Chen Changsheng still possessed rather limited knowledge about the affairs of the world. However, he did know this name since this name was just too well-known.

Before Qiushan Jun, this was the most well-known name on the entire continent. Even up until now, the name was still high up on the Proclamation of Liberation.

Wang Po of the Tianliang County.

Afterwards, he discovered that when Tang Thirty-Six mentioned this name, his expression was very solemn and vigilant. What he still did not really understand was that even though Qiushan Jun was already the first on the Proclamation of Gold Distinction, he was still very far away from people like Wang Po who were in the Proclamation of Liberation and had already been famous for a long time. No matter how he looked at it, it was impossible for Tang Thirty-Six to have any problems with Wang Po.

“How could someone like Xun Mei who had extraordinary talent, unbending willpower, and the heavy hopes of the Heavenly Academy be willing to spend his whole life in the shadow of Wang Po? The reason why he had entered the mausoleum to view the

monoliths for thirty-seven years was to comprehend the true meaning of the heavenly Dao and then defeat Wang Po in battle. This was also why he was still unwilling to leave.

Tang Thirty-Six glanced at the outside of the hut, and said, "After thinking about it now, Wang Po of Tianliang has already become one of his obstacles in Xun Mei's heart. For every day he did not believe he could win against Wang Po, it was another day he was unwilling to leave the mausoleum. Unwilling, afraid, or embarrassed..... They are all correct because he understands very well that the day he walks out of the mausoleum, Wang Po will definitely be outside waiting.

Chen Changsheng stood up and walked to the doorway. Under the starlight, he looked at the middle-aged man in dire straits, and his feelings became somewhat complicated.

Was he unable to leave the mausoleum because he did not have the courage to face the world or because of that person outside the mausoleum? Xun Mei did not think like this. He was once a proud teenager from the Heavenly Academy, so it was impossible for him to lack courage. At least, he would not lack courage when he would face his life's nemesis, Wang Po. Otherwise, he would not have fought hundreds of battles before. Then, why exactly was he afraid to leave the mausoleum?

Sometimes, leaving meant forever. Xun Mei was afraid of leaving the mausoleum because he was afraid of losing the mausoleum. From his upright youth to when he was frustrated and dejected, he had never left this place in the whole thirty-seven years. The mausoleum had caused him to become stronger, and the more this

occurred, the more he was afraid to leave it.

It was just like what Tang Thirty-Six had said during the day, the Mausoleum of Books was just like a jug of good wine to cultivators. The more they drank it, the drunker they became, and the drunker they became, the more they wanted to drink it. When dealing with such a good jug of wine, how much was appropriate to drink? Was it to drink until one had become so drunk that one was unwilling to be sober anymore? Or was it to only take a small sip before putting it away? It was an ordeal every person had to face. Because of Wang Po's shadow, this choice was even harder for Xun Mei to make.

Only Xun Mei had extraordinary talents, and he had also trained hard for thirty-seven years within the mausoleum. So, indeed what level was his current strength? He was already so strong, but he still lacked confidence in defeating his opponent located outside of the mausoleum. So, indeed what level was Wang Po's strength?

However, this was still a problem that had to be solved in the end. Tang Thirty-Six had said Wang Po would definitely be waiting outside on the day Xun Mei left the mausoleum. This did not mean that Wang Po was literally waiting for him outside the mausoleum. Rather, if he left the mausoleum, he would definitely have to go and find Wang Po. Only then could he explain his own life, as well as the thirty-seven years he spent viewing monoliths.

A cool breeze blew past from the forest outside of the mausoleum. It swept up bits of grass on the ground and brushed away the verdant, tender leaves from the trees, which produced a rustling sound like rain. There was only one cool breeze, but it

arose from two directions. Those bits of grass and tender leaves were swept into the center of the forest, and they began swirling together slowly like an upside-down waterfall. It cut the starry sky that the night had projected downwards into countless fragments.

Mao Qiuyu of the Two Sleeved Breeze appeared there. He looked underneath a scholartree and said with a complicated expression, “Twenty years ago, I once invited you to come to the capital to persuade him, but you didn’t come.”

A person stood underneath the scholartree. He seemed to still be very young, yet his eyes seemed a little cold. His clothes were very clean, and his black hair was tied up tightly. However, for some reason, it always gave people a wretched feeling. It was like a teenager who was once a young master, but because of a reversal in fortune, he became a cashier for a tavern for three years.

“If he doesn’t want to leave himself, then nobody will be able to persuade him.” That person said while observing the Mausoleum of Books at night.

Mao Qiuyu asked, “Then why did you come today?”

That person said, “I don’t know. I just feel that he will come looking for me tonight, so I came to wait for him.”

Chapter 205 – Going South Of The Mausoleum

The wattled fencing was pushed over, and the night wind was able to blow in more easily. The temperature of the area around the grass hut dropped. Compared to the starlight which had landed in the yard, the oil lamp within the hut seemed especially dim. Chen Changsheng walked into the yard and looked at the man who was sitting on a rock. He wanted to say something, but he did not know what to say.

Xun Mei had been an expert with astonishing talent in the past, but now, he had already spent thirty odd years viewing the monoliths within the Mausoleum of Books. Therefore, he did not know what level his cultivation had already reached. Xun Mei as expected knew the group of teenagers had arrived behind him and said, “I am not afraid, nor am I embarrassed. I know that I am currently not as strong as he is, so do I even have a reason to leave?”

Ever since his youth, Zhexiu had been exiled from his tribe. He had survived and grown up in the midst of fighting. Although he knew this middle-aged man’s cultivation was extremely high, he still could not accept such an attitude. He murmured, “If you haven’t fought him, then how do you know that you are not as strong as he is? Is there, perhaps, any reason for you to trap yourself within the Mausoleum of Books?”

Xun Mei’s voice became somewhat lonely, “I have already stayed within the mausoleum for thirty-seven years, and I have not communicated with the outside world. I gave up the painting and

calligraphy that I loved most in my youth. I eat only to fill my stomach and sleep only to keep warm. I have put all my time into viewing the monoliths and comprehending the Dao. I have cultivated and meditated, but I am still unable to catch up to him. I also really want to know the actual meaning of life.”

“Do you know Wang Po’s current level of cultivation?” Tang Thirty-Six was a little surprised and said, “I had thought you would not know how much time had passed, and would ask us.”

“Every year, , new people will enter the mausoleum at the end of the Grand Examination. After a period of time, senior will also send someone to visit me. I am not interested in other human affairs, and I do not care who the current emperor is. But I really want to know Wang Po’s current condition. This is why I know his current and yearly condition.”

Xun Mei stood up and gazed at the night sky outside of the mausoleum. He could vaguely see the lights of the capital and said, “The year I entered the mausoleum, he placed first on the Proclamation of Azure Clouds. Afterwards, I knew that he had entered the Proclamation of Gold Distinction and placed second. Afterwards, he entered the Proclamation of Liberation, and he once again placed in front of Xiao Zhang. At that moment, he must have been very happy.”

Wang Po of Tianliang and Painted Armor Xiao Zhang, they were all famous people from the previous generation before Chen Changsheng’s generation. Their positions were similar to Qiushang Jun’s current position, and they were still the true experts of the current age in the continent. Originally, Xun Mei

was the same as they were but with an extremely well-known name. However, as he had never left and stayed in the mausoleum to view the monoliths, the continent slowly forgot about him. At least, some people like Chen Changsheng had no knowledge of him.

“If you did not continue to stay within the mausoleum, your name would definitely be on the Proclamation of Liberation. You would have also had an extremely high chance to place within the top five.” Tang Thirty-Six said while looking at him.

Xun Mei turned around and looked at the three teenagers. He said, “Top five..... is indeed already very glorious, but in the end, it is not first place. So in the end, aren’t I still placed after him?”

Tang Thirty-Six felt that he still could not really understand and asked, “Then, are you, perhaps, only at peace while staying in the mausoleum and becoming forgotten by everybody?”

“The Mausoleum of Books is an opportunity, the only one for me to overtake Wang Po.”

That cold feeling within Xun Mei’s eyes grew heavier and heavier. However, it did not frighten people, and he only seemed to become more determined, “As long as I stay in the mausoleum and continue to view the monoliths, then one day when I reach the top of the Mausoleum of Books, I will completely understand the true meaning of the Dao. On that day, how can Wang Po still be my opponent?”

The yard fell into silence. A kind of small animal was digging under the wattled fencing, and it produced a rustling sound, as if it protested what he had said earlier.

“Senior, in these past thirty-seven years, how many monoliths have you seen?” Chen Changsheng suddenly asked.

After hearing this question, Xun Mei frowned slightly. He lowered his head and thought hard. Then he said, “In the first year, I used three months to comprehend seventeen monoliths. In the summer of that year, there was a huge thunderstorm. After that, my speed began to decrease. By the time it was winter, I had comprehended another five or six monoliths?”

After spending thirty seven-years within the mausoleum, the time had just been too long. He had already forgotten many details from the earliest days, and he needed to think back carefully to remember them. He seriously thought back to the obstacles he had faced before and said, “In the second year, I think I comprehended four monoliths, and in the third, three monoliths? I can’t really remember.”

He shook his head and looked at Chen Changsheng. He said, “I really can’t remember the total amount.”

“However, it is very obvious that how quickly you comprehend the monoliths has become slower and slower.” Chen Changsheng hesitated a little before saying, “Please forgive me for being rude, but perhaps, you are unable to remember how many monoliths you have comprehended in the thirty-seven years. However, you should at least be able to remember how many years it has been

since you last understood a single monolith inscription.”

Xun Mei’s body slightly froze, and his face paled slightly as well. His old, dirty clothes fluttered slightly in the night wind.

“Understanding the inscriptions of seventeen monoliths in only three months. This kind of talent for comprehension really lets people show admiration. That is extremely impressive. I believe that if that stone hut had not been destroyed by His Majesty Taizong, then we would definitely been able to see senior’s name. However.....”

Tang Thirty-Six said while shaking his head, “Since you have such a talent for comprehension, why must you continue to torment yourself inside if you can only reach such a level? I remember very clearly that back then, Wang Po spent a year in the mausoleum, and he had comprehended thirty-one monoliths before leaving.”

Xun Mei’s eyes suddenly brightened, as if he was hurrying to show off his child and said hurriedly, “Although I don’t remember how many monoliths I have comprehended, I am extremely certain that I have surpassed thirty-one monoliths. I have comprehended more than him.”

“So what?”

Tang Thirty-Six was once a student of Heavenly Dao Academy. While looking at this middle-aged man in dire straits, he unconsciously wanted to help him. After hearing what was spoken,

he could not help but feel slightly heartsick. He sighed, “If Wang Po had continued to stay in the mausoleum for a couple of years with his talent for comprehension, he definitely would have also been able to comprehend a few more. But why was he determined to leave? He had a clear idea of his own limits. If he had decided to stay, even though he would comprehend a few more monoliths, the ratio of time spent working hard to producing results would be subpar. This would be wasteful.”

After hearing these words, Xun Mei became a little angry, but afterwards, he realized he did not know how to rebuke Tang Thirty-Six. For a moment, he could not help but stare blankly, and the yard in front of the grass hut once again fell extremely silent.

“Are you saying..... in those years I spent in the mausoleum, I had just been wasting away my life?”

He shook his head and said with a trembling voice, “Both his talent for cultivation and comprehension heavily exceeded mine. What else can help me overtake him other than the Mausoleum of Books? Yes, he still currently stands above me. If I am unable to overtake him while I am inside the mausoleum and he is outside, then what hope do I have if I leave the mausoleum?”

“The monoliths within the mausoleum can help us with cultivation, but many other opportunities exist to help us with cultivation outside the mausoleum. How else could Wang Po become so strong?”

Zhexiu who had always stayed silent suddenly opened his mouth and began speaking.

Xun Mei's brows were tightly furrowed and he asked, "What other opportunities exist outside the mausoleum that can help me with cultivation even more than these monoliths, which contain profound mysteries?"

"There are many."

Zhexiu said expressionlessly, "Battles, trials and tribulations, expanding your horizons, and hardships. Most importantly, there are life and death situations outside the mausoleum."

Xun Mei opened his mouth slightly, but he could not say anything for a long time.

After witnessing this, Chen Changsheng sighed sorrowfully. Zhexiu was clearly a teenager, and his level of strength was way below Xun Mei's. However, he currently spoke to Xun Mei like a teacher educating young kids—A young wolf who had grown up with difficulties on the snowy plains had a more realistic and accurate understanding of the world than a cultivator who had spent thirty-seven years inside the Mausoleum of Books.

"But.....these thirty-seven years....."

Xun Mei turned around to look at the mausoleum in the night sky, and his expression became somewhat frustrated. He said to himself, "There are still many stone monoliths up there that I cannot understand nor read. I really want to understand. If I can reach the top of the mausoleum, understand all of these monoliths,

and grasp the true meaning of the heavenly Dao, I can definitely defeat Wang Po. If I just leave like this, how would I be willing?”

After saying these things, he shook his head with a bitter smile and then walked towards the outside of the yard.

The starlight illuminated bits and pieces of the courtyard, and it also landed on Xun Mei's hair. Perhaps it was the lighting, but Chen Changsheng definitely felt that he could see a few strands of white hair. The night breeze seemed to become a bit chillier.

“Where is he going?”

After observing Xun Mei's somewhat melancholy back and his slightly staggering steps, Chen Changsheng became a little worried. He wondered whether Xun Mei's mind had received too much of a shock or not.

Tang Thirty-Six said slightly sympathetically, “He should be heading toward the mausoleum to view the monoliths..... in the past thirty-seven years, perhaps he was like this every night.

The starlight was very bright. Although it would be slightly difficult to write under its illumination, it was enough to view the monoliths. There were also faint lights that could be seen within the mausoleum. After thinking about it, there must have been many people also viewing the monoliths by lamplight.

“He is not going to view the monoliths.”

Zhexiu's expression suddenly changed. He looked at Xun Mei who had slowly disappeared into the night forest and said, "The path to view the monoliths is north of the mausoleum. He is going southwards."

Tang Thirty-Six stared blankly and said, "Perhaps he was so angry that he became confused and is now travelling in the wrong direction?"

Chen Changsheng was slightly regretful and said, "As the senior spent most of his life within the mausoleum, he is perhaps slightly confused. However, this situation is different. The reasoning we believe is correct seems wrong to him. We are also his juniors after all. Didn't you go a little overboard with your words before?"

"Wrong is wrong. Wasting your life away is wasting your life away. This has nothing to do with being juniors or seniors." Zhexiu said expressionlessly.

"Well..... I want to follow him and see what happens. Hopefully nothing happens."

Chen Changsheng walked towards the exterior of the wattled fencing, and Tang Thirty-Six also followed along. Zhexiu stared blankly at the wattled fencing that had collapsed on the floor for a while, and then he also left the grass hut.

This grass hut was in the southwest region of the Mausoleum of Books. After crossing over the river and walking southwards, they

could hear the rumbling sounds of the dozen waterfalls south of the mausoleum.

Xun Mei's silhouette could be vaguely seen in the night sky. The three teenagers followed him. They passed through the spray of the waterfalls like walking through the spring rain, and they arrived in front of the rock plateau covered with shallow canals.

Starlight scattered across the rock plateau, and the clear water within the canals flowed gently from side to side. It was very beautiful.

Xun Mei waded through these shallow canals, which caused his clothes to become wet. However, he did not pay attention to it at all and seemed to be a little distracted.

He arrived in front of the Divine Path and raised his head to look at the top of the mausoleum. His expression became slightly frustrated.

For thirty-seven years and countless days and nights, he had only wanted to reach the summit. However, he still could not get there unfortunately.

Although the Divine Path led directly to the top of the mausoleum, he did not have a way to walk up it.

This was because of that person clad in armor who sat quietly within the pavilion in front of the Divine Path.

Chapter 206 – Intruding Upon The Divine Path

From a distance, there were faint lights within the mausoleum, and the sound of waterfalls could also be heard. However, the south end of the mausoleum was very quiet. No lamps were lit, and only the starlight illuminated the cliffs, the straight path, the canals, and the rock plateau. However, the starlight was incapable of completely expelling the darkness of night. The clear water within the canals were pitch-black like ink.

Xun Mei withdrew his gaze from the top of the mausoleum and looked at the Divine Path. Then, his gaze gradually shifted to the pavilion and finally rested upon the man clad in armor beneath the pavilion.

After a short moment, he began to walk toward the pavilion. He stepped through the fresh water, as if he were stirring ink, but the splashes of water were silver-colored.

What was he trying to do? Could it be that he wanted to intrude upon the Divine Path? After eyeing this scene, Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six, and Zhexiu grew all the more nervous.

“Senior,” Chen Changsheng called towards Xun Mei.

Previously, he had seen many strands of white hair belonging to Xun Mei underneath the starlight outside the grass hut. His sympathy had grown, but his worries even more so.

Xun Mei's steps ceased, and he turned toward those youths standing at the edge of the rock plateau.

Unlike what Chen Changsheng and the others had imagined, Xun Mei's expression was very calm. There was no frustration on his face, much less the signs of a pitiable and out-of-sorts man. While smiling, he asked, "Young ones, do you need something?"

Chen Changsheng glanced at the pavilion and saw that the legendary Divine General still seemed to be sleeping. After a moment of hesitation, he asked, "What is senior planning to do?"

"I am going to ascend the Mausoleum." Xun Mei pointed at the Mausoleum behind him in the darkness of night.

He did not turn his head, but his finger had been exactly on point. His tone was very matter-of-fact, as if he were heading home. He exuded the feeling of having already walked the Divine Path several thousand times.

To ascend the Mausoleum or to sightsee, Chen Changsheng had not heard clearly. However, regardless of which phrase it was, their meaning was the same. This made the three youths even more worried.

Perhaps it was an illusion or something else, but Chen Changsheng felt that when Xun Mei had spoken those words, the stars in the night sky seemed to have grown brighter for a moment. The starlight that fell onto the canals of the rock plateau

south of the mausoleum seemed to thicken. Underneath the pavilion, the very worn out armor also began to shine from the starlight. His heart began to throb even more with terror because the Mausoleum Guard who had always had his head down and his face obstructed by his armor, had issued forth a light wind from underneath the helmet, carrying some dust along with it. This was at the exact moment when the stars had grown brighter..

Chen Changsheng did not dare take another glance, even if it was only out of the corner of his eyes. He asked Xun Mei, "Why?"

If Xun Mei could defeat the Mausoleum Guard underneath the pavilion and use the Divine Path to ascend directly to the summit of the Mausoleum of Books, then why did he endure these thirty-seven long years in the Mausoleum? It was very likely that he would have intruded upon the Divine Path long ago. Since he had not, it was very clear to himself that he had no chance of victory.

Yes, even if Xun Mei's level of cultivation were even more profound, he still would not have been able to overcome that obstacle underneath the pavilion. If that person could be so easily defeated, how could that armor have accumulated several hundred years of dust? Even if Xun Mei surpassed Wang Po, Xiao Zhang, and other such famous names, viewed the monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books for another thirty-seven years, and pushed his cultivation to even more unfathomable levels, he still would find it difficult to defeat the man underneath the pavilion.

Out of the continent's thirty-eight Divine Generals, Han Qing occupied first place. This expert who sat underneath the pavilion for several hundred years was only worthy of being mentioned

alongside the Five Saints and Eight Storms of the Cardinal Directions. Of course, those on the Proclamation of Liberation had profound levels of cultivation as well, but regardless of Wang Po of Tianliang or Painted Armor Xiao Zhang, they would still not dare say they had the qualification to challenge him.

After hearing Chen Changsheng's words, Xun Mei fell silent for a while. He did not directly answer, but instead he seriously replied, "Thank you all."

As he expressed his thanks, his gaze brushed over the three youths.

From birth, Zhexiu's meridians and sea of consciousness had problems. He had to bear the pain of the Tide Rush of Blood at all times. If he were a normal person, then he would have long ago lost the courage to live, but he did not. This sort of courage was rarely seen. Chen Changsheng made stir-fried vegetables, cooked rice, and steamed salted fish. This sort of tranquil state of mind was something he had long yearned for. Tang Thirty-Six had made a loud ruckus in such a sacred place as the Mausoleum of Books. This allowed him to see the hot-blooded passion of youth, which had long been lost to him.

Xun Mei said nothing, but this was his answer to why he had wanted to climb the mausoleum.

Tonight, he had met these three youths, who had used their bravery, will, and youth to awaken him.

The thirty-seven years he had spent viewing the monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books were simply a long dream. After waking from a dream, there were certain things he had to do.

“All of you woke me up. I want to see the truth, so I need to ascend the mausoleum.”

Xun Mei once again pointed calmly and resolutely to the mausoleum behind him.

“If senior has truly awoken...then shouldn't you be leaving the mausoleum to find Wang Po and where each of you stand?” Tang Thirty-Six asked in bewilderment.

After hearing these words, Xun Mei roared with laughter. The laughter echoed throughout the rock plateau, which caused the inky water within the canals to shudder.

The laughter gradually faded. He looked at the three youths and calmly replied, “Is Wang Po really my enemy?”

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu faintly understood while Tang Thirty-Six gradually began to frown.

“No, after thirty-seven years, the shadow over my cultivation has long since ceased to be him, but it.”

While smiling, Xun Mei continued to point at the Mausoleum of Books behind him.

Chen Changsheng and the others were stunned at these words and then fell silent. Countless years before, the Heavenly Tomes had descended like fire from the heavens. They eventually landed on the continent and opened knowledge to humanity, until humanity had learned the ways of cultivation. Certainly, this mausoleum occupied an irreplaceable role and position in human society, but to countless cultivators, the Mausoleum of Books was in many ways their greatest enemy.

The incomprehensible words and drawings on the monoliths were a tall mountain they had to surmount and opponents that they had to defeat. Although the mausoleum did not look tall or treacherous at all, in reality it pressed up against the blue dome of heaven. It was exceedingly difficult to surmount it while relying only on human strength, such that countless cultivators had their courage and spirit shattered upon trying.

Xun Mei had awoken and faced the truth. He had finally realized who his true opponent was.

As a result, he did not choose to leave the Mausoleum of Books and find Wang Po, but he chose to intrude upon the Divine Path instead.

The forest outside the mausoleum was extremely quiet and was without a single stray sound. Logically, there was no way for the conversation happening south of the mausoleum to carry over here, but those two men in the forest somehow understood Xun Mei's intentions. Mao Qiuyu's two sleeves trembled with emotion. The brows of the man underneath the scholartree leapt up, making

an eight (?) character. His eyes were incomparably bright and almost mesmerizing.

South of the Mausoleum, the three youths had also understood Xun Mei's intentions, but there was still something they could not accept — to wake up from a thirty-seven year long dream, return to reality, learn who his enemy was, and then challenge him. This was naturally a very valorous course of action, but if he lost, then he would enter into a dream of eternal darkness, so this seemed too desperate a course of action.

Chen Changsheng had only met Xun Mei today, and they had not exchanged many words. Reasonably, there should have been no empathy between them, but for some reason, he felt a close connection to this man. He sympathized with him and wanted to do something for him. He did not believe that he had just awoken only to find his death. He said, "Please be careful."

Xun Mei chuckled, and then said nothing more. He turned around and continued on his way toward the pavilion. He was tread through the water as he went, and the water was splashing about and soaking his shabby shirt.

One hundred yards away from the pavilion, he stopped.

The rock plateau south of the mausoleum was black, but the space in front of the pavilion was white. It was the same color as the Divine Path, and they mixed together as a whole.

The black rock plateau and the white Divine Path. This was the

dividing line and perhaps also the line between life and death.

The face of the man underneath the pavilion was obscured in the shadow of his armor, so it was impossible to make out his face clearly.

Suddenly, countless motes of dust flew out from underneath the helmet. In the starlight, they seemed like tiny fireflies.

A sound followed the dust from underneath the helmet.

That sound was deep and resonating, and it caused the water from the canals to leap about in turmoil as if in joy and fear. It echoed throughout the cliffs of the Mausoleum of Books.

It was as if that man had slept for several hundred years and had only now awakened.

As a result, the Mausoleum of Books had also awakened.

The faint lights from the lamps at the north of the mausoleum seemed to slightly sway with the sound echoing throughout the cliffs. Afterwards, sharp sounds of breaking filled the air: hahahahaha.

As the night wind blew gently, Gou Hanshi was the first to arrive at the edge of the rock plateau with his shirt still flowing from the wind. He was closely followed by Liang Banhu, Guan Feibai, and Qi Jian.

“What’s going on here?” Guan Feibai took a step forward and looked at the scene before him in surprise.

Tang Thirty-Six mockingly replied, “Can’t you see? Someone wants to intrude upon the Divine Path.”

“Someone actually dares to intrude upon the Divine Path? Who is it?”

Gou Hanshi guessed that the man underneath the pavilion was the legendary Mausoleum Guard, the continent’s number one Divine General Han Qing. Then, who was that shabby-looking middle-aged man opposite him?

“Xun Mei.” Chen Changsheng answered.

“Snow-treading Xun Mei?” Gou Hanshi arched his eyebrows. He seemed to be in some surprise.

Stunned, Qi Jian said, “Xun Mei is actually still alive? It can’t be that the rumors were true, the he had been hidden in the Mausoleum of Books for all this time viewing the monoliths?”

On the side, Zhexiu expressionlessly said, “ We have already discussed these exact same words.”

Qi Jian only now realized that Zhexiu was there. His small face

became filled with hate, and he grasped the hilt of his sword.

Zhexiu paid no attention to him, but kept his eyes on the scene playing out before him on the Divine Path.

“Why is it that only you four from the Mount Li Sword Sect came over? The sound just now was so loud, so how could those guys not have heard it?” Tang Thirty-Six asked.

Gou Hanshi replied, “Those people are viewing the monoliths and aren’t willing to leave.”

To still be viewing those monoliths deep into the night, Chen Changsheng found it difficult to understand. Was the temptation of the Mausoleum of Books really so great? Then, he thought back to how even Xun Mei, whose talent was so broad and deep, had also been imprisoned by those monoliths for thirty-seven years. When he looked at the mausoleum again, he suddenly felt that it was somewhat more sinister.

“Those who cross the line will die.” A voice resounded from the pavilion.

The voice came from the shadowy depths of the old armor. It was very ordinary, but it seemed to bring a sense of great change. It was like an ancient city wall. Its surface was overgrown with moss and the stones seemed ready to come loose, but in reality they were incomparably firm. The most powerful attack would be incapable of making the slightest mark upon its surface.

Xun Mei stood before that invisible line and looked towards the pavilion. He said, “I don’t want to retreat, nor can I stand here forever. Then, I must try and see if I can cross this line.”

“Several decades ago, Wang Po had said the same thing. But in the end, he stood there for an entire night and took not one more step forward.”

The worn-out armor completely encased the body of the legendary Divine General, and his voice also had to pass through the armor to be heard. His voice seemed muffled, and it also had a strange flavor to it like a sharp blade or a tongue licking the edge of the blade. It was the sweet smell of iron mixed together with that of blood.

Chapter 207 – The Battle Amidst The Snowstorm

After hearing these words, the surroundings of the rock plateau became incomparably silent.

Everyone there understood that when Wang Po had entered the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths in the first year, he confirmed that staying any longer would be throwing his life away. However, he ended up like many others who were reluctant to leave. As a result, he wanted to try the shortcut. However, in the end, he ended up standing behind the line for a night before turning around and leaving the mausoleum at daybreak.

Outside of the mausoleum, Mao Qiuyu looked at the man in the scholar tree.

That man said nothing.

Xun Mei stayed silent for a while, and then he understood why Han Qing, in his capacity as Mausoleum Guard, had spoken these words. “So, senior already knows who I am.”

The suit of armor under the pavilion still remained motionless, but that transformative voice erupted from the gloom. “Of course I know who you are. Several decades ago, the cultivators of the continent began ushering in a new set of blossoming flowers: Wang Po of Tianliang, Painted Armor Xiao Zhang, Immovable Mountain Liang Wangsun, Snow-treading Xun Mei....you were all the most gifted and had the most potential. In the fight against the

Demon Race, humanity's hope rested upon your shoulders....You stayed in the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths for thirty-seven years, so I watched you for thirty-seven years. You really aren't bad. Tonight, you finally broke through that obstacle in your mind, so why don't you leave. Why do you insist on trying the alternate path?"

"No, the obstacle in my mind is before my eyes. I have only seen it, but I have not broken through it. As for the alternate path, it could also be the correct path."

Xun Mei's gaze swept past the pavilion and again fell upon the mausoleum's summit.

Han Qing's voice paused for a moment before once again reverberating: "Wang Po was a smart man. Since you have set him as your target, then at the very least you should show the same wisdom."

"Correct, all my life I have wanted to surpass him. Now that I look at it, at least on this matter, he is not my equal." Xun Mei replied.

Han Qing replied indifferently, "He is not as stupid as you?"

After thinking for a moment, Xun Mei replied, "He is not as foolish as me."

Han Qing paused for a moment and then replied, "That is

reasonable.”

In the forest outside of the mausoleum, that man’s hand rested against the scholar tree, but he continued to stay silent.

“In these hundred or so years, you are the first to intrude upon the Divine Path.” In the pavilion on the south of the mausoleum, Han Qing continued to speak.

Xun Mei replied, “I am relatively foolish.”

Stupid and foolish were two words that had similar meanings. However, there was a big difference between them.

“A foolish man can have good karma.”

Han Qing replied, “As the Mausoleum Guard, I am part of the Mausoleum of Books. If you defeat me, then you are allowed to walk upon the Divine Path.”

Xun Mei’s expression was calm as he clasped his hands in a formal greeting.

This was an established rule of the Mausoleum of Books, and it was also right and proper. If one could defeat the continent’s number one Divine General, then one was obviously an expert who could stand alongside the Five Saints and the Eight Storms of the Cardinal Directions. If such an expert wanted to view the Heavenly Tomes, why would they comply with the Zhou Dynasty’s rules?

Chen Changsheng felt that Divine General Han Qing had not said these words just for Xun Mei, but for the youths standing at the edge of the rock plateau.

Xun Mei glanced at his feet and noticed where the rocky plateau came to an end and where the Divine Path began. This was where black gave way to sacred white.

Then, he lifted his knee.

Under the pavilion, Han Qing's head remained bowed. His appearance was obscured in the shadow of his armor, but his voice suddenly became cold. "Xun Mei, although your life has greater meaning for humanity if you remain alive, I am still the Mausoleum Guard. What I guard are the rules of the Mausoleum of Books, so I will not hold back. You may also fight without worry and without any hesitation."

After waking up from his thirty-seven year-long dream, Xun Mei wanted to see the truth at the summit of the mausoleum. How could he hesitate? It was as if Xun Mei had not even heard the words from the opposition, and he took one step forward.

The step he took was very ordinary. His foot very casually hit the ground and did not make a sound.

The sounds around the pavilion were still sounds of water: the sound of water from the waterfalls descending from the cliffs onto the rocks below and the gurgling water in the canals.

Xun Mei's foot had crossed the line.

The Mausoleum of Books that had been shrouded in darkness suddenly lit up brightly.

The glow from lamps were barely visible very late in the evening. The only light that could possibly illuminate the entire mausoleum could only come from the sky. It would have to come from the sea of stars.

Chen Changsheng raised his head and saw the stars in the night sky shine with unmatched brilliance. He unconsciously squinted his eyes.

In reality, the stars in the sky did not actually grow brighter. Even if they had, there would be no way that a human eye could tell the difference. This was purely a feeling or maybe something only the spiritual sense could perceive.

Everyone near the rock plateau felt it, but none of them could perceive it as well as Chen Changsheng could. This was because none of them had a spiritual sense as tranquil and profound as his.

He could even faintly sense which star had begun to shine first among the countless stars in the sky.

That star was in the distant depths of the southeast region. Perhaps it was Xun Mei's Fated Star.

After taking one step forward to see the truth, the Fated Star had sensed that and had suddenly grown brighter. Xun Mei....just what level had he cultivated to?

Chen Changsheng thought back to that time in the Pavilion of Ascending Mist where he saw the starry sky and became filled with a sense of awe.

The brilliance of the starlight turned the entirety of the Mausoleum of Books into a world of silver.

Xun Mei stood before the pavilion. The hair, which he had bound behind him in the courtyard of the grass hut, had at some point become free and flowed down to his shoulders. The starlight had instantly washed away the filth on his body. His long hair floated in the breeze, and those silver-white hairs particularly stood out.

He stood between the Divine Path and the rock plateau. He remained in the same place, and he obviously had not begun walking toward the pavilion....but he had already begun walking toward the pavilion.

On the Divine Path, a footprint gradually appeared.

The Divine Path was made of white stone. His footprints were wet, so they were naturally very distinct.

Xun Mei had tread through water, so his shoes were naturally wet.

After observing this scene, Chen Changsheng's eyes went wide. Zhexiu also just stared blankly where he was. They had grown up in Xining village's old temple and the cold, bitter snowy plains respectively. They had rarely seen a true battle between two experts, so they had no idea, unable to explain those footprints. Comparatively, Tang Thirty-Six and the four members of the Mount Li Sword Sect were relatively more calm.

The wet footprints continued to appear on the Divine Path, as if there was an invisible man walking across it.

Xun Mei looked calmly at the pavilion.

Not long afterwards, the footprints had already moved ten or so yards closer to the pavilion.

There was a metallic sound.

Under the pavilion, the night wind began to blow.

Han Qing's head remained bowed, and his sword remained undrawn. However, the sword leaning against his chest already seemed eager to leave, half an inch out of its sheath.

It was only half an inch, but it seemed like it had already been fully drawn.

Countless motes of dust flew off the edge of the sheath, diffusing into the air of the pavilion.

Along with this dust, an incredibly powerful Qi emerged from the middle of the pavilion, spanning the entire breadth of the Divine Path.

This Qi was still like iron, and it still had blood. It was solemn and firm like an ancient city wall stained with the blood of countless soldiers.

No one could see this wall, but they all knew that it was there, sitting upon the Divine path.

Xun Mei's steps ceased. For a long time, wet footprints did not appear on the Divine Path.

Then, his gaze pierced through that pavilion and the monstrous figure sitting under it. It landed upon the Mausoleum of Books, just like a match to a fuse, which began to burn fiercely with a crackle.

His gaze began to burn. His vision began to burn. His eyes began to burn.

His eyes began to shine, as if they were newborn stars.

His body began to slowly lean forward.

A wet footprint once again appeared on the Divine Path.

If Han Qing's sword was a city wall, then he wanted to directly smash this city wall to pieces.

On the Divine Path, traces of water became more and more defined as the footprints marched forward. This was the path he would take.

He was going to walk the Divine Path, walk under the pavilion, and proceed directly to the summit of the Mausoleum.

After each step he took, his face grew paler and paler. Each step was more and more painful, but his eyes were filled with joy.

Life is only real when there is pain.

What he wanted to face was reality.

As time passed, the footprints on the Divine Path continued to press forward, until they had almost reached the pavilion.

Xun Mei was still separated from the pavilion by about one hundred yards, but he could already see that pair of eyes in the shadows of that armor.

Two powerful Qis silently clashed south of the Mausoleum.

The clear water in the canals seemed to boil in alarm, and then it began to overflow in all directions. The supple and formless water slowly began to take a form.

Even the firm and hard black rock plateau began to change. Under the pressure of their powerful Qi, it began to sink down and form a depression.

It was as if an unfathomably huge, heavy, and invisible boulder had landed on it.

Stone fragments flew about, and the edges of the canals produced a tooth-aching and distorted sound.

Only by rapidly retreating did Chen Changsheng and the others avoid the shockwave. After observing the cracked and sunken surface, their eyes were filled with awe while looking at the two figures upon the Divine Path.

The clash of their Qi did not last for too long.

Xun Mei stared at the pavilion, and then he whistled.

The whistle was like that of a stage manager's who ordered someone to begin spreading paper pieces all over the stage. These paper pieces represented fake snow, but at this moment, real snow came falling down.

No, it was not snow, but starlight that had been split into numerous pieces.

The scattered starlight that drifted down was in no way different from snow.

Xun Mei stood in the snow, as if he had gone back to the old days.

In those days, he had been a teenager. He had stood before his teacher's door for three days and three nights until the snow had piled up to his knees.

What year was that? It was a year even earlier than from thirty-seven years ago.

After almost fifty years of bitter cultivation and thirty-seven years of viewing monoliths, he had long ago ceased to be that frail child who had fallen badly sick from the cold of the storms.

He was a cultivator that had almost reached the level of Saint Realm.

Only until now did those youths who were viewing the battle realized that Xun Mei's cultivation had reached such a level. They could not help but be shocked into silence.

At this time, the Mausoleum Guard under the pavilion lifted his head.

The features which had been obscured in the armor's shadow finally saw light.

It was an elderly and apathetic face.

His shout cut through the air.

Countless motes of dust spilled out of the countless cracks in his armor.

He had sat before the Divine Path for several hundreds of years.

This was several hundreds of years' worth of dust.

Several hundred years ago, the war between humanity and demons had entered its final stage.

He had been the last general appointed by Wang Zhice.

When he finally lifted his head and looked at Xun Mei, his gaze served as the sharpest sword.

In addition, his sword had truly left its sheath.

The scattered starlight slowly drifted down to the ground.

Divine General Han Qing's sword was steadfast in the wind and snow, like a golden spear or armored horse.

In front of the pavilion, it had already become a snowy plain.

From Xun Mei's perspective, this shredded starlight was the snow from the days when he had stood before his teacher's door.

From Han Qing's perspective, this shredded starlight was the snow that fell on the battlefield from all those years ago.

Two different snows represented two different wills. They each had their own wills.

Although they were separated by over one hundred yards, Xun Mei looked at that elderly face as if it was up close.

This battle had finally entered its climax, the moment in which victory and defeat were decided. The two experts had both unleashed their strongest techniques. The teenagers viewing the battle from the edge of the rock plateau were incapable of withstanding it anymore. Even if they took steps after steps backwards, they still were blown every which way by the violent snowstorm, and could fall over at any time.

At this moment, Gou Hanshi suddenly grasped Chen Changsheng's left arm. Chen Changsheng understood his intention and forcefully grabbed onto Liang Banhu's arm. They held onto each other tightly, like tender trees amidst a snowstorm. They

were lined up in a row, steadily resisting the full force of nature.

If the conditions far away from the battle were so bitter, then it could imagine what those two in the center were undergoing at the moment.

The battle between a general of one hundred battles and a poor, humble scholar amidst the snowstorm. In the end, who would obtain victory, and who would suffer defeat?

Chapter 208 – Thank You And You're Welcome

It was as if time had stopped at that moment.

Scattered starlight was afloat like fragmented snowflakes suspended in the night sky before the Mausoleum of Books.

Xun Mei and Han Qing silently stared at each other.

A snowflake fell from the edge of the pavilion's roof and landed on Han Qing's armor. It quickly melted and turned into vapor shortly thereafter.

Time began to flow once again.

Gou Hanshi's expression changed slightly, and he did not hesitate to release Chen Changsheng's hand. He grabbed the handle of the Iron Ruler Sword on Qi Jian's waist and pulled it out as quick as lightning.

Chen Changsheng's reaction was also extremely fast. With a clatter, he pulled out the Wenshui sword on Tang Thirty-Six's waist at his side.

The two swords pierced through the small snowflakes in front of them.

With a huge bang, the front of the Divine Path rumbled.

Afterwards, there were countless shattering sounds, and numerous pieces of ice shattered. The whistling sound of wind and snow soon followed.

After some time, the battlefield returned to silence. The fragments of starlight were not real snow, so naturally, no mantle of snow was in front of the pavilion.

Xun Mei had left several dozen footprints upon the Divine Path. The more forefront of the footprints had actually accumulated snow.

That footprint had originally been wet with the clear water from the canals. But now it had been frozen into bits of snow.

Those footprints, starting from the forefront, gradually turned into the color of snow.

As each step turned into snow, the footprints gradually grew more indistinct.

It was as if the person that had been walking on the Divine Path had started to retreat.

Those footprints continuously turned to snow, disappeared, and retreated, until it finally reached that line.

Xun Mei's will had been pushed back into his body.

His leaning body, suddenly straightened, as if it had been struck.

Xun Mei left the ground and was tossed backwards into the air with a bang. His black hair danced in the air, and his strands of white hair were as eye-catching as ever in the starlight.

However, what was even more colorful was the blood that spurted from his mouth.

He landed heavily upon those twisting canals with a great splash.

Cheng Changsheng immediately ran over after seeing this, completely disregarding how dangerous the Qi's aftereffects still were. For some reason, he felt very close to Xun Mei.

Both the night sky above the rocky plateau and the ground below it were covered with cracks. It was extremely frightening. After moving only twenty yards, Chen Changsheng's shirt received countless fine cuts. At the same time, many white marks appeared on his skin. If he had not undergone perfect Purification, he would have certainly been drenched with blood. Perhaps, he would not have even been able to run to Xun Mei's side.

The night wind gradually lessened, and the snowflakes turned back to starlight. The Mausoleum of Books returned to its tranquil state. Only then did Gou Hanshi finally put down the Iron Ruler

Sword in his hands.

Previously in that final moment, countless shattering sounds had arisen from the field of battle. These were the cutting Qi flows that had arisen from the clashing of Qi's from the two powerhouses, resulting in a sound that swept in all directions. If Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng had not reacted so quickly and used the swords to resist, those youths would have received many injuries. It was a good thing that despite how frightening the battle was, the Qi that had come at them was only the leftovers. In addition, the Iron Ruler Sword was the Relic Sword of the Mount Li Sword Sect's Discipline Hall, and even held a place on the Tier of Legendary Weapons, so it suffered no harm. Only the back of Gou Hanshi's hand had received many fine cuts, which were currently bleeding.

He passed the Iron Ruler Sword to Qi Jian, and then he also began running toward the scene.

Chen Changsheng had already carried Xun Mei out of the canal and was taking his pulse.

Xun Mei lay on the ground. The blood that stained his clothes had been washed off by the waters of the canal, and he seemed to have no wounds.

Just like Chen Changsheng, Gou Hanshi also felt very close to Xun Mei for some reason. When Xun Mei had been intruding upon the Divine Path, they had both been silently cheering him on. Naturally, Gou Hanshi didn't want there to be anything wrong with Xun Mei. He asked, "How is he?"

Chen Changsheng withdrew his fingers from Xun Mei's pulse, and then after a moment of silence, he shook his head.

A battle between two cultivators at the peak of Star Condensation, one that could be said to approach the level of Saints, would be more terrifying than any other battle that had occurred before in front of the Divine Path. Although Xun Mei's body had no wounds externally, the meridians within his body had actually all been broken. His Ethereal Palace had also been shattered. Although his sea of consciousness had remained unharmed, he had no chance of living.

This was completely different from the situation with Chen Changsheng's body.

Gou Hanshi was at a loss for words.

Tang Thirty-Six and the others had also run over at this point.

In the pavilion, Han Qing once again bowed his head, and the elderly face sunk back into the shadows of his armor. Besides the floating dust, it was as if he had never moved.

No one paid attention to the fact that a faint sigh escaped from the gloom.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, but please send me out of the mausoleum."

Xun Mei looked at the youths and feebly spoke, “I’ve been in here for thirty-seven years. I’m rather tired of it, and I certainly don’t want to die in here.”

Although he was very weak, his expression was very peaceful. To those who cultivated the Dao, sought the Dao, and achieved the Dao, how could there be any unwillingness?

After thinking it over, Gou Hanshi asked, “Does senior.... have anything that he would like to hand over?”

“I still have the strength to say my last words, so there’s no need to worry about it.”

With some difficulty Xun Mei laughed, then he looked at them all and seriously said, “I would like to thank all of you children.”

This was the second time he had solemnly expressed his thanks.

Zhexiu expressionlessly replied, “We didn’t do anything.”

Xun Mei replied, “In the end, your words about dying with a clear mind at least made me understand why I have to die. How could I not thank you?”

Chen Changsheng seemed like he wanted to say something but held back.

Xun Mei smiled. “Did you want to talk about borrowing a room?”

Chen Changsheng thought to himself you’re about to die, how could I ask such a thing?

Xun Mei said, “It’s just a shabby hut. If you all want to live in it, then live it. I have stayed here for thirty-seven years. After the Grand Examination every year, I would always see several children eat and sleep outdoors for several days before realising and finding a place to stay,however, I liked the quiet. You all can stay there, but just don’t let other people in too.”

These words concealed some other meaning, but how could Chen Changsheng and the others have taken note of it?

Gou Hanshi picked Xun Mei up and placed him on Guan Feibai’s back. These youths sent Xun Mei out of the mausoleum.

For some reason, those Monolith Guardians never made an appearance.

After arriving at the front gate of the mausoleum, there was no need for Tang Thirty-Six to call anyone over. The stone doors slowly opened by themselves.

The ground trembled, and the lamps outside the mausoleum rocked back and forth. The soldiers guarding the mausoleum were already waiting outside.

Xun Mei indicated that Guan Feibai should set him down, and then he walked outside of the mausoleum.

Chen Changsheng and the rest looked at his back with extremely complex emotions.

This former proud son of the Heavenly Dao Academy was finally leaving the mausoleum of Books after thirty-seven years.

However, he probably only had this one night to live.

Xun Mei himself seemed to have no regrets as he casually walked out.

Entering the mausoleum and exiting the mausoleum. These thirty-seven years were just between the opening and closing of the stone gate. Life and death was also in between an opening and closing.

Outside the Mausoleum of Books were two people that had been waiting for Xun Mei for the whole time.

Chen Changsheng and the others recognized the Heavenly Dao Academy Principal, Mao Qiuyu, and they paid him respects from within the door. However, they curiously wondered who was the other person?

If it were any other day,, he would have given some encouraging words upon seeing youths like Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi. However, today, he only had eyes for Xun Mei;ow could there be a place for anyone else? He urgently took two steps forward to support Xun Mei. His lips trembled as if he wanted to say something, but in the end, he said nothing.

Xun Mei forcefully took two steps back and paid his respects. Then with a trembling voice, he said, “Senior, I’ve disappointed you.”

Upon hearing the word “Senior”, tears began to fall from Mao Qiuyu’s eyes. “That doesn’t matter. None of that matters.”

After seeing his senior cry, Xun Mei could not hold back. His eyes moistened, and he replied, “The fact that I woke up in the end can already be considered fortunate.”

Then, he looked at the other person. “I really didn’t think you would be waiting here for me.”

That person’s mood was very complicated. “I always felt that today would be the day you would leave the mausoleum, but I hadn’t imagined that you would come out in such a way.”

Feeling somewhat ashamed, Xun Mei told him, “In the past few years, I have also disappointed you.”

The man’s expression suddenly became solemn. With extreme

disapproval, he replied, “What disappointment? In tonight’s battle, you turned the stars into snow and glimpsed the great Divine Dao! If Divine General Han Qing was not the Mausoleum Guardian, if he was not wearing that suit of armor, then there would have been no way he could have defeated you. With regards to cultivation, you have already surpassed me.”

Xun Mei was stunned at these words. In disbelief he asked, “Are you saying that I have already surpassed you?”

That person replied, “You know that I never tell lies. This is true, even now. ”

Xun Mei stared blankly at him. “Starting from the age of twelve, I’ve fought with you one hundred and twenty-seven times, but I could never beat you. I didn’t think that I would finally win one at the last moment.”

After saying these words, he was so happy he began to laugh, as joyful as a newborn child. The hint of coldness around him vanished.

Only after hearing all this did Chen Changsheng and the rest realize who that other person was. They could not help but feel shocked.

This person, whose clothes were extremely clean, and whose eyes were set a bit close to each other, giving off the impression that he was distressed, was actually that man?

Yes, the man that controlled half the wealth of Scholartree Manor, was this seemingly poor and destitute looking man, one of the world's most famous names and powerful cultivators, Wang Po of Tianliang.

Wang Po earnestly said to him, "In the future, when I become a Saint, I will take you to see the peak of the Mausoleum."

Xun Mei chuckled. "That's you, not me. In the end you still want to make angry?"

Wang Po asked, "Then in the end, what should I say?"

Xun Mei was also clearly very interested in this question, and asked, "What do you want to say the most?"

Wang Po seriously thought it over, then finally said, "Thank you."

As he gave his thanks, his expression was one of complete sincerity. There was no falsity or consolation.

Yes, the shockingly talented and exceptionally gaudy Wang Po of Tianliang of the past was no more. Otherwise, why would Xun Mei have locked himself away in the Mausoleum of Books for thirty-seven years?

If there had been no ever-chasing and determined Snow-Treading Xun Mei who refused to concede defeat, then how could

there have existed the present-day Wang Po of Tianliang?

Xun Mei calmly looked at him and said, “You’re welcome.”

The stone doors slowly closed.

The last picture that Chen Changsheng and the others saw was Xun Mei in Mao Qiuyu’s lap, his eyes closed.

Back at the grass hut, some of the youths sat on the doorstep, others walked on the fence, and more others looked at the mausoleum, but none of them had anything to say.

Gou Hanshi was the oldest and his cultivation was the most profound, so at this point, it was reasonable for him to say something. However, he did not.

To young people like them, succeeding in the Grand Examination and entering the Mausoleum should have been the highpoint of their lives. Who could have imagined that they would encounter this sort of situation on the first night?

In the future, who amongst this group would be saying “Thank you” and who would be saying “You’re welcome”?

Chapter 209 - Viewing The Monoliths At Dawn

The courtyard was quiet, the mood was oppressive. The first to break the silence was Chen Changsheng.

He walked into the hut and saw Tang Thirty-Six finishing the leftover tea-soaked rice. For some reason, this angered him. Any other time, he probably would have left to wash the dishes and wipe the table twice over, but right now he was not in the mood. He told the others, "I'm going to bed."

Having said that, he turned around and walked into the hut, found a blanket, and put it over his face.

The rest, who were still immersed in that complex and melancholy mood, were rather surprised when they saw him really go to sleep. Guan Feibai arched his eyebrows and unhappily said, "He really is a cold-blooded guy."

Gou Hanshi shook his head to indicate that he should say no more.

Tang Thirty-Six sneered. "You bastard, you're just a battle maniac. How are you any different from that old man under the pavilion?"

Suddenly, Zhexiu spoke up. "To be a little cold-blooded is better."

Everyone there was stunned by those words, such that even Tang Thirty-Six thought it was a little far-fetched.

“Colder blood means less likely to get a fever, and even less likely to go crazy.”

Zhexiu expressionlessly explained himself, turned and entered the hut. He found a blanket, laid on the bed and began to sleep.

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly thought of something and walked into the hut. “Hey, how many blankets are there anyway? You haven’t used them all, have you?”

Hearing this, Guan Feibai leapt from the doorstep and shouted into the hut, “I don’t care how many blankets there are, but we need at least two!”

On the brink of death, Xun Mei had passed on this grass hut to these youths. It was a very solemn affair, as if it were his greatest legacy. In reality, the hut was very crude and wretched. It only had three rooms; the kitchen, the main room and the inner room. No one could stay in the kitchen, and the remaining two were very small. To have seven people living there was rather crowded.

Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six, and Zhexiu stayed in the relatively nicer looking inner room. After all, they had come first; and while Xun Mei had given the hut to all of the youths, he did so mostly because of those three. Thus, other than Guan Feibai, who stubbornly putting his all into getting two blankets, the four

disciples from the Mount Li Sword Sect really had no objections.

Xun Mei had only left three sour-smelling blankets. After two of them had been wrested away, there was only one left. Fortunately, Zhexiu had grown up in the snowy plains and did not need a blanket. To normal people, spring was a chilly season; but to him, it had the all the pleasantness of early summer. As the child of such a wealthy household, Tang Thirty-Six had actually brought a fur skin with him. Thus, luckily, Chen Changsheng did not have to share his blanket.

The night grew darker, but Chen Changsheng's eyes remained open; he had not fallen asleep.

It was not because of the sour smell coming off the blanket, although that was certainly a big reason.

The person that had slept on this bed for thirty-seven years just died before their eyes. Who could sleep knowing that?

Like him, there were actually many people who could not sleep.

“Was it worth it?” Tang Thirty-Six asked as he looked out the windows at the stars in the night sky, his mood downcast.

Zhexiu's eyes were closed. He was not asleep, but he did not respond. Thought on this matter was unnecessary.

Chen Changsheng also did not answer; but, under the blanket, he

gripped that black stone a bit tighter. Last night in the Pavilion of Ascending Mist, he had understood some things. Tonight in the Mausoleum of Books, he had encountered some things. These things all came up too abruptly, and were too much for his fifteen-year-old self to handle. In fact, he was probably even more frustrated than Tang Thirty-Six.

Gazing up at the stars, he could feel that distant little red star which was his own. He silently thought, if I wanted to change my fate, I would first have to change the fate of all the people I'm connected to, changing their stars. But how can I know which stars correspond to which people? Xun Mei...where is his star? There was already a connection between the two, would his death change anything? Or is it to say that because he entered the Mausoleum of Books, Xun Mei's fate had changed? To change his fate, would he really have to bring suffering and death to those by his side?

And if the star he affected were his Senior's? Or Tang Thirty-Six's? Or Luo Luo's? Even if it were Xu Yourong's, would he be able to coldly look on as her star grew dim? Just as he was thinking about such trivial things, Tang Thirty-Six suddenly got up, flung off the fur skin, and began to fan himself with the front of his shirt.

"What's wrong?" He asked.

"It's a little hot." Tang Thirty-Six continued, "I really don't know how the people in my family prepared for this."

Chen Changsheng chuckled, but did not say anything.

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly turned to him, his mood serious. “Chen Changsheng, I need to tell you something.”

Puzzled, Chen Changsheng asked, “What?”

Tang Thirty-Six was very serious. “In the future, no matter what happens, I won’t ever say ‘thank you’ to you, and you won’t ever say ‘you’re welcome’ to me.”

Chen Changsheng did not respond. He knew that Tang Thirty-Six had been deeply moved by Xun Mei and Wang Po’s final conversation.

Guan Feibai’s jeering voice came from the other room. “How come you’re the one saying ‘thank you’ and he’s the one saying ‘you’re welcome’? You’ve already decided that, in the future, you’re going to be Wang Po, and that Chen Changsheng will never be your match; only able to play the role of encouraging you forward? Don’t forget, he’s already at Ethereal Opening. You’re still pretty far from him!”

In this serious setting where two brothers shared their bond, Tang Thirty-Six could not help but fly into rage at these sudden words. He shouted back, “You make it sound like you’re so much stronger than me!”

Guan Feibai sneered. “Regardless of how much stronger I am, I’m still stronger.”

Gou Hanshi interjected. “Stop quarreling.”

Chen Changsheng added in, “Just go to sleep early.”

The hut finally grew quiet. However, not too long after, everyone heard Qi Jian’s shy voice.

“Second senior brother, I.... I.... think I’m hungry.”

There was silence, then laughter all around.

Qi Jian’s small face blushed.

Chen Changsheng saw that while Zhexiu’s eyes were closed, the corners of his lips perked up.

After a few rounds of argument and laughter, their moods had all somewhat settled down, and they gradually fell asleep.

Chen Changsheng was still awake. He calmly looked out the window at the night sky filled with stars.

Tonight, Xun Mei had said he had learned a lot from him and Zhexiu. In truth, Chen Changsheng had also learned many things.

Zhexiu had said that the most important thing in life was not to

live, but to live awake or die awake. To him, the most important thing in life was to follow his heart. In the old temple in Xining village, he had studied the Daoist Canons with his master. The Dao which he had practiced was not for killing people with flying swords, or living forever without aging, but to follow his heart.

When trying to live while facing death, the only thing that held any meaning was that he was already between life and death, so he obviously had to stay sober and follow his heart.

It was also because he had truly faced life and death that in the past few years, he had taken the three words 'follow your heart' and cultivated them to an incredible level. He had then gone to the Divine General's estate to cancel the engagement, appeared at the Ivy League Gathering, and finally obtained the first place on the First Banner in the Grand Examination. However, when he had finally been able to enter the Pavilion of Ascending Mist and discovered those secrets, he had seen life's hope for the first time in many years, but his heart had been instead perturbed.

His loss of interest in cultivation and his playing tourist on the first day in the Mausoleum of Books were because his heart had been confused. Fortunately, he had heard Zhexiu's answer and met Xun Mei. Xun Mei had taken thirty-seven years to wake up, while he had only used one night. He could not help but admit that he had been rather lucky.

Now that Chen Changsheng had gotten back his tranquil mood, he naturally returned to his familiar lifestyle. Despite the fact that so many things had happened last night, that both his body and soul were worn out, and that he had even slept later than usual, he

opened his eyes and woke up early at five o'clock when the sky was still dark.

When he awoke, he did not immediately get up, but instead took five breaths of time to calm his mind. Then, he got up and put on his shoes and clothes. As he prepared to make the bed, he realized that there were two people on the bed. He saw Tang Thirty-Six tightly holding onto his fur skin, curled up into a ball, like an insecure child. In contrast, Zhexiu was lying on the ground with his back straight, and, to bluntly put it, he seemed like a stone statue.

Chen Changsheng shook his head and walked to the outer room. He saw Gou Hanshi, Liang Banhu, and Guan Feibai all bundled up under one blanket, while Qi Jian slept in the corner with his own blanket. Chen Changsheng could not help but shake his head. Truly, the Mount Li Sect Master's final disciple received special treatment.

He walked out to the courtyard and went to the nearby creek, using the water to wash his face and rinse his mouth. Afterwards, he cooked a big pot of rice porridge and also steamed the remaining two-thirds of the salted fish. Then, he went over and opened the window in attempt to wake up Tang Thirty-Six. Tang Thirty-Six's two hands balled up into fists, and he spat out a few angry expletives, after which Tang Thirty-Six paid him no more attention.

For the third time after he woke up, Chen Changsheng shook his head. He helplessly turned around, only to find Zhexiu squatting by the collapsed fence as he brushed his teeth. He could not help

but be surprised. Chuckling, he said, “I didn’t expect this.”

Squatting on the ground, Zhexiu did not turn his head. He said in a somewhat muffled voice, “Didn’t expect what, that a wolf cub like me like to be clean?”

Chen Changsheng thought it over and decided that it was his way of thinking that was wrong. Apologetically, he replied, “It was my mistake.”

Zhexiu threw away the tree branch that he had been using to brush his teeth, which he had gotten from a willow or some other tree, and then cupped some water in his hands to wash his face. Finally, he said, “There’s nothing to be mistaken about. On the snowy plains, I really wouldn’t wash my face every day. The oil and grease can help protect me against the wind. But at the very least, I would brush my teeth twice a day, and from time to time, I would chew on some ice.”

Chen Changsheng was intrigued. “Why did you do that?”

Zhexiu replied, “On the snowy plains, meat would sometimes freeze solid. Sometimes I would have to eat the meat raw, and that requires a good set of teeth. Only in this way would my teeth be strong enough to chew on it.”

Chen Changsheng thought it over and agreed. “Very reasonable.”

Zhexiu added, “In the various tribes, the old people that lived the

longest would often have the best teeth.”

Chen Changsheng noticed that Zhexiu’s teeth were indeed very white and healthy.

Paired with the salted fish, the two each drank down three bowls of porridge, then left the grass hut. Cutting through a large forest of orange fruit trees, they walked towards the Mausoleum of Books.

Nobody said anything along the way, so the atmosphere was very quiet.

When they had almost arrived at the main path in the Mausoleum, Zhexiu suddenly stopped. “It’s a bit weird,” he said.

Chen Changsheng stared at him and asked, “What’s weird?”

“I’m used to being alone.”

After a moment’s thought, Chen Changsheng replied, “Then you first.”

“I still need you to cure my illness, so you should go first. Besides brushing teeth, the snowy plains have another rule: you shouldn’t offend your doctor.”

Chen Changsheng laughed. “You don’t need to be so courteous

about this sort of thing.”

Zhexiu did not respond, instead directly thrusting out a clenched fist.

Chen Changsheng was rather surprised. “Don’t tell me we also have to fight over this?”

Zhexiu asked, “Do you know how to play the finger-guessing game?”

“I only know how to play rock-paper-scissors.”

Zhexiu was silent for a moment, then finally said, “I also only know that game.”

Using a tattered rag to wrap around a rock-like fist, Chen Changsheng was able to obtain victory and was the first to leave. Following the main path north while occasionally hearing the fluttering of the morning birds, Chen Changsheng shortly arrived at the Mausoleum of Books’ main gate and walked on the only path by which one could view the monoliths.

The monoliths were all in the mountain, so naturally, this monolith-viewing path was a mountain path. However, it was not very steep. There were many stone steps carved into the path, making the climb very easy.

It was just now truly dawn. The morning sun rose from the

eastern horizon, illuminating the distant buildings in the capital. The Palace of Great Brilliance and the Pavilion of Ascending Mist were particularly prominent.

The somewhat chilly morning wind lightly brushed his cheeks while the dawn light illuminated his path forward. As he walked through the quiet woods while listening to the song of the morning birds and saw the morning sun be turned into a flowery face by the tree branches, Chen Changsheng's mind was serene and joyful. Although he had started a day late compared to others, it did not really matter.

Yes, this was indeed wasting away at his life.

Just as he had mentioned to Zhexiu, playing chess and the zither, painting and calligraphy, and enjoying the scenery were all a waste of life.

But how beautiful wasting one's life in this manner was.

And how beautiful it was to have a life to waste in such a manner.

Within the quiet and uninhabited mountain forest, Chen Changsheng climbed the steps. Soon afterwards, he arrived at a monolith. He walked in front of the monolith, but all he could see on it were marks that seemed to have been made by knives and hatchets, not words. There also did not seem to be any lines; it was very obvious that somebody had destroyed them. He recalled the decree that the Divine Empress had issued in the past, and he knew that this was not the monolith he had come to see. He shook his

head and continued walking.

He did not walk too far before he saw yet another monolith.

This place was a cliff, and in front of the cliff was a hut. The monolith stood in the center of this hut.

The eaves of the hut furled out on all sides. Even if there was a great storm, it would be very difficult for this monolith to get wet.

Chen Changsheng walked to the front of the hut and looked at the monolith, and his state of mind wavered slightly.

The shape of this monolith was not very proper. Even its thickness was not uniform. Compared to normal monoliths in the world, it seemed even more like an unfinished product.

The monolith's surface was very glossy. Who knew how many hands had rubbed against it?

This was a Heavenly Tome Monolith.

The first monolith of the Mausoleum of Books.

Chen Changsheng restrained himself from looking at the monolith's surface, and looked around the hut instead.

The forest outside the hut acted as an obstacle. The stone steps continued no further, ending at a rock plateau.

Through the gaps in the forest, one could faintly see the eaves of roofs in the distance. Perhaps they were other monolith huts, but there was no path to reach them.

Seeing this picture, Chen Changsheng became lost in thought.

The morning light spilled over the rock plateau, a cool breeze ran through the trees, and two kingfishers chirped as they flew into the sky.

Chen Changsheng awoke from his stupor, and then turned to the monolith within the hut. He subconsciously put his hands behind his back and calmly began to examine it.

When his gaze landed upon the surface of the monolith, he could not keep his heart from racing.

Chapter 210 - The Reflecting Monolith

It was very quiet around the monolith hut; Chen Changsheng was the only person present. It was completely different from yesterday. At that time, there had been dozens of examinees in front of this monolith hut. Though very quiet, there had been simply too many people for it to not feel crowded. The sounds of rustling fabric and footsteps would never cease. Even when night fell, those people did not leave, but instead lit the lanterns in front of the hut. However, the Mausoleum of Books had already existed for countless years. People from many sects and academies had entered the mausoleum and viewed the monoliths. They had summarized their experiences long ago, and passed along this knowledge before the Grand Examination. After the initial excitement had died down, the examinees finally realized that viewing the monoliths was not something that could be done in one day and night, and that they had to take care of their bodies. Heeding the advice of their seniors, they had descended from the mausoleum and begun to search for places to rest. Right now, they were all probably still asleep.

Chen Changsheng knew nothing of these events as he seriously examined the monolith.

The surface of the monolith was black and covered with innumerable lines that were thick and thin, deep and shallow. The lines had been carved onto the surface by some sharp tool, and they seemed to curve off randomly. The lines covered the entire surface of the monolith, making countless connections with each other to form an indescribably complex pattern. If one looked at it through sentimental eyes, or viewed it through the lens of history, those lines would seem to carry some primal meaning. But if one looked at it calmly and disposed of their reverence to the Heavenly

Tomes, those lines actually did not seem to have any pattern, much less carry any meaning. Instead they seemed like the nonsensical drawings of some small child. Many scholars felt that those lines had possibly been naturally formed, a school of thought that had been popular many years ago.

Today was the first day that Chen Changsheng had set his eyes on a legendary Heavenly Tome Monolith, so he naturally did not have the ability to draw any conclusions. Chen Changsheng's heart suddenly started to beat faster, not because he had suddenly understood something or because he was shocked at having seen those lines before, but because of the sort of emotion that naturally came from seeing a legend with one's own eyes.

Yes, he had seen the marks on this Heavenly Tome Monolith, the so-called monolith inscriptions.

It was not by chance or destiny, nor was it through some miracle. Many people had seen the incomprehensible monolith inscriptions of the Heavenly Tomes—outside the Mausoleum of Books, there were countless stalls on both sides of the main road that were selling rubbings of the monolith inscriptions. Almost every tourist visiting the mausoleum would have a set of these rubbings. One has to realize that these rubbings were the Mausoleum of Books' best-selling souvenirs.

Countless years ago, the rubbings of Heavenly Tome Monoliths were already in circulation. After the human dynasty had gradually tightened the distinction between social classes, an emperor had attempted to forbid the spreading of the monolith inscription rubbings . However, there were already too many

rubblings outside, and their existences were too enticing making it impossible to stop. In the end, they were unable to prohibit it, and were forced to drop the matter.

Rubbings of the first seventeen monolith inscriptions were especially common. During the previous dynasty, those rubbings had been publicly sold three times by the government, printing a dozen official editions. At least several million had been printed, enriching the palace treasury, while also providing suitably soft paper for people to use for cushioning on their mahjong tables at home.

The simplest reason why the rubbings of the monolith inscriptions were so widespread, besides the fact that their circulation was impossible to stop, lay in two points. Firstly, to look at rubbings of the monolith inscriptions and to see them for oneself were two completely different things. Since ancient times, countless cultivators had testified that only by seeing the monolith inscriptions with one's own eyes would one be able comprehend the true meaning of the Heavenly Dao hidden within the inscriptions. Secondly, there was a limit to the number of monolith inscriptions contained in these rubbings. The vast majority of the rubbings were from the Monoliths in the front mausoleum. It has to be noted that those who were able access additional monoliths were undoubtedly experts whose knowledge of the Dao was exceptionally profound, so they cared not for fame and profit. Take, for instance, a expert like Wang Po of Tianliang, who possessed shocking talent. That year, he had only viewed thirty-one monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books. Even if he had succumbed to greed, he still would not have been able to take a rubbing of those later Monoliths and take them out of the mausoleum.

After Chen Changsheng had arrived in the capital, he had stayed in the Plum Garden Inn outside the Mausoleum of Books. He would see stalls carrying those rubbings of the monolith inscriptions every day, so naturally he had bought some. When he first held those rubbings in his hands, he had been extremely excited. Only after he had realized that they had no meaning did he toss them to a side.

But now that he stood before the Heavenly Tome Monolith, looking at those lines carved on the Monolith first-hand, it was a completely different matter.

For tens of millions of years, this monolith had sat silently under this hut, as enigmatic as ever.

The lines on the black surface of the monolith began to float up in Chen Changsheng's eyes. A mark on the lower right of the monolith that had been deeply carved into the surface suddenly bulged out. The dozens of lines connected to it also started to leave the surface, seemingly hovering in the air.

Chen Changsheng knew this was an illusion. When the mind became connected to the Mausoleum of Books, one's ability to see reality was affected. Back when he was a child, he would study the Daoist Canons in Xining village's old temple, and read the various accounts of viewing the monoliths left behind by members of the Orthodoxy. Thus, he was not too shocked by this abrupt change, and instead chose to maintain his calm.

The so-called change was not actually any change at all, but a trick of light. The objective truth was that the lines remained

where they were.

Regardless of whether it was overcast or pouring rain, if the hut was there or not, if the surface was wet or dry, if one looked at in the gloom or in dazzling light, the monolith was ultimately still a monolith. Those lines were still lines. But when comparing those rubbings of the monolith inscriptions circulating among the people to the real thing, was not this change the greatest difference?

The positions were relative, and the appearances were also relative.

As positioning changed with landmarks, the appearances changed with environment.

If one wanted confirm one's position, one needed to also confirm the position of the surrounding landmarks.

If one wanted to examine the unvarying and objective truth, then should not one first understand how the environment affected the objective reality?

The information that those who viewed the monoliths had to understand, the principals that they had to comprehend, were they not hidden within this transformation?

Standing before the hut, Chen Changsheng examined the Monolith Inscription. He stayed in this position for a long time

without moving..

The morning sun had now completely risen above the horizon, transmitting its warmth to the mausoleum facing the crimson morning clouds, gradually dispersing the chilliness of the forest. The side of the Heavenly Tome Monolith was dyed red in the light of sun, a truly beautiful sight.

Seeing that smear of red on the edge of the monolith, Chen Changsheng closed his eyes, steadied his mind, and then turned around.

He no longer looked at the monolith, but instead explored the hut's surroundings.

The branches of the trees in the forest were all dyed red, and looked as if they were about to ignite. As for those distant and barely distinct monolith huts in the distant, it was exceedingly difficult to ascertain their positions. He had walked up from the base of the mausoleum all the way to this first Heavenly Tome Monolith. The path had come to an end, and there was no way to proceed to those other monoliths. However, it was said that the Mausoleum of Books had only one path. What was going on here?

The morning sun ignited the tree branches, and the radiant red light of the sun illuminated a portion of the dark cliff face. It was only then that he saw that a line of words had been carved into the cliff.

Unlike the ineffable Heavenly Tome Monoliths, the words on the

cliff were very easy to understand, because they had been written in a language that everyone could read.

["The foggy woods are reflected in the smoky river water](#), Houses with painted eaves on the banks are adjacent to each other. Gently on the patches of lotuses shines the autumnal light. The pearl-woven curtains are bathed in the fragrant wind of ten miles."

(TN: The author used the parts of the poem "[An Ode on Southern China](#)" by Zhang Yanghao.)

This poem had been composed by the Leader of the Way around two thousand years ago. When he had first entered the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths, he had been so moved that he had composed this poem.

From then on, the first monolith in the Mausoleum of Books had possessed its own name: Reflecting Monolith.

From the time he had arrived at the front of the monolith hut to the time of his departure, Chen Changsheng had viewed the monolith for not even a quarter of an hour. He turned around and left without the slightest bit of hesitation.

Leaving the Reflecting Monolith, he followed the mountain path down. After passing through a mountain depression, he saw Zhexiu. Judging from the time, Zhe Xiu had probably been standing there for quite a while.

Zhexiu arched his brows. Clearly, he had not expected Chen Changsheng to return so quickly.

“I’m not much for noise, so I don’t want to view the monoliths while crammed with other people.” Chen Changsheng gave a rather unconvincing explanation. Seeing the faint columns of kitchen fires rising up from the forests around the mausoleum, he advised Zhexiu, “It looks like everybody has woken up. If you want to view the monoliths undisturbed, it’s best to be fast about it.”

Zhexiu nodded and set off on the mountain path.

Chen Changsheng watched Zhexiu walk off, and after some hesitation, he called out, “I don’t think you need to see it for long. It’s not very useful; in fact, it might even be detrimental.”

Zhexiu paid him no attention.

Chen Changsheng continued walking down the mountain. On the path, he encountered a middle-aged man clothed in white.

He recognized the man as one of the Monolith Guardians that had explained the rules of the Mausoleum of Books to them.

These Monolith Guardians had sacrificed their youths and lives to the Mausoleum of Books, so everyone had some form of respect for them. Chen Changsheng was no exception, so he gave a respectful bow.

The middle-aged man did not return the bow, and did not even nod in response . However, he did not leave, and instead indifferently looked at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng felt uneasy and asked, “Does Senior have something to tell me?”

“You are Chen Changsheng?” That middle-aged man asked, his tone cold.

Chen Changsheng was amazed that this man who could never leave the mausoleum actually knew his name. Somewhat cautiously, he replied, “Correct.”

“You are the one who obtained first place on the First Banner?” That middle-aged man continued to question him. His tone was now not only ice-cold, but also contained sense of severity.

Chen Changsheng’s levels of unease and confusion continued to grow, and he responded, “That’s right.”

That middle-aged man asked in a low voice, “From the time you ascended the mausoleum to the time you left, about a quarter of an hour has passed. Are you telling me that in such a short time, you were able to comprehend the Reflecting Monolith?”

Chen Changsheng tried to explain. “Of course not, I....”

Without waiting for him to finish, that middle-aged man coldly

admonished him. “Of course, I know there is no way you could have comprehended the Reflecting Monolith in such a short amount of time! You think your powers of comprehension are that great? I’m saying that your attitude isn’t proper! You can be as silly as you want to be outside the mausoleum, you can be the first rank on the First Banner or have some other qualification, but you’d better get this straight: this is the Mausoleum of Books! This is the place where countless Saints humbly comprehended the Dao! I’ve met countless people that were first place on the First Banner, so don’t think that your name allows you to be so impudent!”

Hearing these skull-splitting words of admonishment, Chen Changsheng was stunned. If this was really a senior pointing out the flaws of the junior, then it would have been fine, but it was very obvious that all the man wanted to do was humiliate him. Stranger still, the man was a Monolith Guardian that could never leave the Mausoleum of Books, so why would he hold such enmity against Chen Changsheng?

That middle-aged man looked at him without even concealing his contempt and disgust. He continued, “I’m warning you, the Mausoleum of Books is a holy ground! No matter how great your background is, you must still revere this place. And don’t you even think about bringing any of those grotesque things from the chaotic world inside this place. At the very least, tell that to the man outside the mausoleum who came to find you.”

Chapter 211 - A Myriad Of Monolith Comprehension Methods (Part One)

After saying these words, the middle-aged man took his leave. Chen Changsheng stood on the mountain path, baffled at what had just occurred, and naturally also a bit angry. After a little time had passed, he realized that the man had last mentioned that someone in front of the mausoleum was looking for Chen Changsheng. Arriving at the mausoleum entrance, he saw the still closed stone doors, which made him reminisce on the scene from last night of Xun Mei walking out those doors. Just as he had begun to feel somewhat melancholy, he suddenly heard somebody calling his name.

He followed the voice to the side of the stone door and saw that there was a small window set into the wall, through which Priest Xin was waving at him. Somewhat surprised, he paid his respects through the window then asked, "Why did sir come?"

Priest Xin passed some things through the stone window and replied, "His Eminence asked me to come and check on you."

Chen Changsheng received the things and replied, "All of our luggage is still on the carriages. Yesterday they didn't let us bring it in."

"Those are the rules of the Mausoleum of Books. After they've finished checking them, they will return it to you. It should probably all be done by the end of the day."

Chen Changsheng thought about those sour-smelling stinky blankets back in the grass hut and decided to ask, “Could I trouble sir to get us some clean blankets?”

Priest Xin was surprised, then replied, “That won’t be difficult.”

“Since they will be returning our luggage to us, then I don’t think there’s anything else I need.”

Chen Changsheng looked through the things Priest Xin had handed over and realized that there was actually a bag of boiled chicken eggs. He could not hold back his curiosity and asked, “In the Mausoleum of Books, do we have to manage all three meals by ourselves?”

Priest Xin explained, “Every school and sect has made preparations so that every day they can have supplies delivered. As for the commoner students, the Imperial Court will supply them with daily necessities, but they will be of lesser quality. Right now the Orthodox Academy still has many things that need to be done, so you and Tang Thirty-Six definitely would not have made any preparations. Instead, His Excellency the Bishop has already taken care of your preparations, so there is no need to worry.”

Holding a conversation through this tiny window, Chen Changsheng could not but feel a little strange. It felt like he was a prisoner speaking with a visitor.

Seeing his expression, Priest Xin guessed at what he was thinking. “The Mausoleum of Books is a holy ground, yet it is also

a prison.”

Chen Changsheng was a little surprised, but then he thought back to Xun Mei’s bitter experience. “That’s reasonable. Many thanks to sir for this warning.”

“How could I be the one to have said such reasonable words? His Holiness the Pope of the previous generation said them. His Eminence asked that I convey those words to you.”

“I understand.”

Through the stone window, Priest Xin looked into his eyes. “You must remember, in one month’s time the Garden of Zhou will open. You must come out before that time.”

Chen Changsheng did not answer, but instead brought up the incident on the mountain path with the arrogant Monolith Guardian.

“How could this happen?”

Priest Xin creased his brow. “To make it easier for their students to view the monoliths, those various schools and academies probably found some way to curry favor with a few of the Monolith Guardians. Along with their special status, this would probably make some of them arrogant and aloof; but they have all offered themselves to the Orthodoxy, so how would they dare offend you?”

Chen Changsheng did not quite understand the logic behind these words. “Not dare offend me?”

Seeing him so at a loss, Priest Xin smiled. “Right now the entire world knows that you are someone watched over by His Holiness and the His Eminence. To offend you is to offend the Orthodoxy.”

When the Monolith Guardian had been lecturing, he had said that no matter how great Chen Changsheng’s background, the youth would still have to revere the Mausoleum. Now that he had heard what Priest Xin had to say, Chen Changsheng had a newfound understanding of those words. Inwardly the youth guessed that it was because of his background in the Orthodoxy that caused some of the Monolith Guardians to innately have some antipathy towards him.

Pondering over these matters, Chen Changsheng walked back to the grass hut. It was completely empty. Those youths had all probably gone to the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths. The large pot of porridge he had cooked before dawn had all been eaten up and all the dishes had already been washed. Even the water jar had been refilled. Although he had not seen who had done it, for some reason he felt that it had been Gou Hanshi who had taken care of it all.

Even though there would be new blankets, Chen Changsheng still took the three blankets that Xun Mei left over and carefully washed them several times. Only after making sure that the thirty-seven year’s worth of sweat and sour taste had been completely washed away did he finally put them out to dry in the courtyard.

He then cut through the orange grove and came to a distant vegetable field. It was the beginning of spring, when the yellow had not turned to green, so the vegetable field did not have much fresh produce to choose from. The green that could be seen was onions, garlic, and leeks. He picked a few spring onions and dug a few potatoes, then returned to the courtyard and began to prepare lunch.

Once Chen Changsheng had brought the water in the pot to boil, he took some of the dried meat Priest Xin had given him, cut it in two, and threw it into the pot. On top of the meat, he began to cook the rice. Inside the rice he had mixed in fingernail-sized potato pieces. He washed and diced the spring onions, then arranged them on the kitchen stove. He also took out the boiled eggs, ready to place them by the side of the pot at any time. Having finished, he nodded his head in satisfaction and washed his hands.

While it was true that salted fish and dried meat were tasty and paired well with rice, they were not very healthy; eating a lot would be bad for the body. Priest Xin said the archbishop had taken care of matters. The Mount Li Sword Sect would probably also have sent someone to deliver supplies. He didn't know if he would be able to guarantee fresh meat and produce in the future. Cheng Shangsheng sat on the doorstep thinking about these sorts of things. If yesterday he played the tourist for the entire day, then today was he going to play the cook? In the Mausoleum of Books, rather than go view the monoliths to strenuously ponder their secrets, he instead thought of these sorts of matters. If someone were able to see him sitting on the doorstep lost in thought, who knows what their reaction would be?

As Chen Changsheng sat on the doorstep, he looked out into the

grass hut's courtyard at the half-toppled fence and the not particularly good-looking trees in the orange grove. It was very peaceful, and for a very long time he did not move an inch. Obviously, matters of food and drink did not need such a long time to think about, and he had never been concerned about matters between men and women; so what was he pondering?

Gazing at the toppled fence and the fog in the forest gradually being dispersed by the sun, he was extraordinarily focused, to the extent that he didn't even realize that the luggage that they had left outside the mausoleum had been delivered.

The cries of birdsong finally caused him to awaken from his contemplation, upon which he finally saw the small mountain of luggage to his side. He walked over and found his bag, then took a brush, ink, paper, and inkstone from it. He then resumed sitting on the doorstep, staring off at the fence and the trees, except this time his hand held a brush and inkstone with ink by his side.

As time passed, the sun gradually rose higher, and the angle at which light struck the courtyard changed with it.

The fence was very scant and, moreover, on the verge of the collapse. Amongst the stakes, though, there were a few that were thicker than the rest.

As the light changed, the shadows that those stakes cast also changed. The tips of the branches of those trees in the grove also began to change. The stakes began to grow shorter. Beside them the thin stalks of bamboo began to grow wider. Under the ever brighter sun, some of branch tips seemed ready to disappear;

whereas others, because of the shadow cast by the light, grew more distinct.

Chen Changsheng quietly looked at this scene and its various transformations. He thought back to the early morning in front of the monolith hut. As the sun rose, the lines upon the surface of the monolith changed with red warmth of the sunrise, as if they had come to life. When the edges of the deep lines were lit by the sun they seemed to grow thinner, while the shallow lines seemed to grow wider.

Those complex and ineffable lines: the Monolith Inscriptions. The inscriptions that had endured countless years of wind and rain and would never change. But were not they changing at this very moment? If the messages hidden within the Monolith Inscriptions were fixed, how is it that everyone that had read them found different meanings? Yes, it was all because of these changes.

Chen Changsheng dipped his brush in ink, opened his notebook, and began to draw. He didn't use words to record his insights, instead capturing what was in front of his eyes as well as his inferences. He began to describe those lines on the Reflecting Monolith, the end of his brush traveling heavily across the paper.

After who knows how long had passed, Chen Changsheng's brush stopped. He had actually managed to draw the entirety of the lower right corner of the Reflecting Monolith into the notebook. He then took out the book of rubbings that he had bought in one of stall outside the Mausoleum, turned to the page with the Reflecting Monolith and began to compare the two. He then realized that there was a large discrepancy between them;

compared to the rubbings, the drawing on his notebook was clearly much more vivid. If his strokes had been even more vigorous, perhaps those drawings would be even more vivid, as if they were about to come to life.

The fog in the forest had completely dissipated, and the bamboo in the fence had become drier. The light shining on the courtyard was incredibly bright; it was actually now noon.

Chen Changsheng rubbed his aching eyes, then closed his eyes to rest them for a while. As he got up to prepare lunch, he realized that no one had come back. All around the grass hut was silence. Because the temperature had risen, even the birds in the trees did not feel like singing. He felt rather lonely standing in front of the door by himself..

The rice had long ago been cooked, so he placed it on the side to cool. The fragrant smell of the potatoes mixed with that of the dried meat, making for a very strange yet alluring smell. He took out one half of the dried meat from the pot, and after a moment's thought sliced off only a small piece. He cut this piece into even smaller pieces and poured them into the rice bowl. He also peeled a boiled egg. Along with a cup of mild tea, he hastily concluded his lunch.

After the meal, he took a casual stroll around the courtyard, then he returned to the hut and took a rest on the bed. He then returned to the doorstep, notebook in his left hand and brush in his right, and resumed being lost in thought while staring at the scenery. If the light was incessantly changing with time, then he would have to incessantly examine it.

As the sun gradually set, the rays of light that spilled over the courtyard gradually grew more intense. The stakes and bamboo stalks that made up the fence, the tree branches which splayed in every direction, they all changed with the light. Chen Changsheng watched quietly for a very long time, then finally put his brush to the paper, attempting to commit all the changes that he had observed in the afternoon. The changes were not very precise, only representing a set of hastily executed lines.

By dusk, he had drawn the majority of the inscriptions of the Reflecting Monolith.

He knew that he was not far from understanding this set of Monolith Inscriptions.

At this time, the other people boarding at the grass hut returned to the courtyard one by one.

The first to arrive was Liang Banhu. Chen Changsheng nodded his head at him in greeting, but Liang Banhu did not seem to notice. Liang Banhu headed straight towards the kitchen and drank a ladle of water. Afterwards he headed out the courtyard and stood on the collapsed portion of fence that Tang Thirty-Six had last night pushed over. He stared at the sun gradually setting below the mountain, his face full of sadness and joy.

Qi Jian followed soon after. The youth was rather dazed, but he didn't forget to greet Chen Changsheng. As Qi Jian entered the hut, he narrowly avoided striking his head against the door. After

some time, he emerged from the hut and, for some reason, bowed his head and began to walk around the courtyard. His mouth constantly moved, but it was hard to know what he was saying.

Chapter 212 - A Myriad Of Monolith Comprehension Methods (Part Two)

One person stood on the broken fencing while watching the distant setting sun, his face filled with both sorrow and joy. Another person was pacing around the shabby thatched cottage, his mouth seemingly chanting spells, so he seemed to be deranged. This scene was truly rather odd. Who would have thought that these two youths were disciples of the heaven-shaking Mount Li Sword Sect and members of the Divine State's Seven Laws?

Chen Changsheng had also initially been shocked, but then he had remembered that Liang Banhu and Qi Jian had most likely just come back from viewing the monoliths. They had likely been struck by some insight and were in the process of digesting it, so he did not bother them.

As twilight continued to darken the sky, more and more people were returning to the grass hut. Gou Hanshi's expression was as calm as ever. It seemed that comprehending the monolith inscriptions had not done any harm to his mind. As for the forcefully abducted Guan Feibai, he was worse off than Liang Banhu and Qi Jian. Like a drunkard, he constantly shouted, "I can still hold on for a bit longer, I can still hold on for a bit longer!"

Chen Changsheng asked, "He's fine, right?"

"He's fine, it's just that he's used up too much spiritual sense. The shock inflicted by the monolith inscriptions on his sea of consciousness was too great."

Gou Hanshi apologized for his junior's lack of manners, and used his fingers to press a few pressure points to make Guan Feibai fall asleep, before tossing him into the hut.

Chen Changsheng had deliberately not used any of his spiritual sense when he had been viewing the monolith. Now that he had seen the state of Guan Feibai, he felt that it had been right to be careful.

Tang Thirty-Six returned, his face filled with fatigue. He could not muster the strength to say anything. He waved at Chen Changsheng, then immediately entered the hut and went straight to sleep. The last to arrive was Zhexiu. By then, the night had already turned pitch-black. The many stars in the sky shined upon Zhexiu's abnormally pale face. It was very obvious that he too had also consumed an excessive amount of spiritual sense.

With the departure of the setting sun, Liang Banhu awoke from his stupor. Qi Jian had also grown tired of walking. Wiping his sweat, he returned to the courtyard. However, upon remembering what he had done, his face flushed red from embarrassment.

Chen Changsheng went to the kitchen to prepare dinner. Gou Hanshi brought Qi Jian along to assist. Before long, the house became filled with the smell of steamed rice, as well as other scents. Qi Jian went to wake up Guan Feibai and Tang Thirty-Six for dinner. Gou Hanshi and Liang Banhu sat at the table in silence, with two plates of dried meat in front of them.

“What’s wrong?” Chen Changsheng asked.

The cooked, dried meat had been sliced up and split between the two plates. On one plate, the dried meat had been fried with onions and oil, while on the other plate, it had been soaked in sugar.

Gou Hanshi replied, “I...didn’t think that sugar could be put on dried meat.”

Liang Banhu’s expression was somewhat fearful. “Will it taste good?”

“I had it twice when I was little, it tastes very good.” Chen Changsheng offered Gou Hanshi a pair of chopsticks.

Gou Hanshi took up a piece of the sugarcoated meat, and creased his brows as he placed it in his mouth. After chewing it around, his brows relaxed.

There was no way Liang Banhu would fail to interpret his senior’s expression. With gusto, he grabbed a few pieces of the sugarcoated meat for his own bowl, and then squatted over by the doorstep and gulped it all down.

After dinner, Qi Jian washed the dishes. Guan Feibai sat by the table, his face still gloomy. Clearly, he was still rather dissatisfied at being pulled away from the Heavenly Tome Monoliths by Gou Hanshi.

“Not happy?” Gou Hanshi calmly asked.

Guan Feibai’s expression suddenly became fearful. He quickly got up and bowed. “This junior would not dare.”

Gou Hanshi shook his head. “You still aren’t willing to leave the Reflecting Monolith.”

Guan Feibai helplessly replied, “Those people whose levels of cultivation are so much less than mine are still persevering in front of the monolith. Obviously, I can still view them for a bit longer.”

“What sort of things are the Heavenly Tome Monoliths? How can it be that studying and comprehending them is a one-day affair? Why should it occupy your every waking moment?”

Guan Feibai was somewhat vexed. “In one month, the Garden of Zhou will open. There’s too little time...Wang Po took one year to comprehend thirty-one monoliths. My cultivation is so far below his, and I only have a month! How many monoliths can I comprehend? Senior, I can only do my best to make use of every second.”

“Although the Garden of Zhou is good, how can it compare to the Mausoleum of Books? Before we left the sect, master told us that regardless of what happened, the first thing that we should do is to grasp the meaning of those monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books...Sect Master definitely knew of the the Garden of Zhou’s opening, so this was probably what he meant. Of course, cultivating the Dao is all on the individual, so you can make your

own decision.”

Gou Hanshi shifted his gaze to Qi Jian and Liang Banhu, who were currently washing the dishes, then looked back at the tightly closed door. “You should all think very carefully about this.”

“I also heard that even Mount Li Sword Sect’s Sect Master thinks the same way.”

Chen Changsheng looked at Zhexiu’s pale face and shook his head. He took out a few needles, used his fingers to press a few places on Zhexiu’s shoulders, then slowly and firmly pushed the needles in. His fingers kneaded Zhexiu’s stomach in a seemingly casual manner, but there seemed to be a rhythm to it. As he did this, he continued to speak, “This is only the first monolith, why so anxious?”

Zhexiu expressionlessly said, “It’s precisely because this is the first monolith that they are anxious.”

Chen Changsheng sent his true essence through the needles into Zhexiu’s body, keeping a close watch on the state of his meridians, as he asked, “And why is that?”

Zhexiu looked out the window. “In front of the Mausoleum of Books, there is a monolith. There were once many names on the monolith, but later on, they were all hacked off.”

Chen Changsheng knew of the monolith Zhexiu spoke of. That

monolith held a ranking similar to that of the Proclamation of Azure Clouds. It ranked people by the speed at which they comprehended the monoliths. A hundred years ago, after the Divine Empress had acted in place of His Majesty to ascend the Divine Path and offered sacrifices to the heavens, she had seen that monolith. To view the monoliths was to glimpse the Heavenly Dao, and she had felt this ranking disrespected the Heavenly Dao, so she had ordered for it to be destroyed.

“Even though the ranking on that monolith is no more, who would forget those names?”

Zhexiu continued, “There were twenty-three people who needed only one day to comprehend the Reflecting Monolith. In the past, Zhou Dufu only needed to take a glance at the surface of the monolith before immediately moving to the second.”

Thinking about this legendary figure who had possessed a nigh unfathomable level of talent, Chen Changsheng could only remain silent.

Tang Thirty-Six was laying on his side in the bed with his furskin rolled up to his chest, watching as Chen Changsheng treated Zhexiu. Upon hearing those words, he could not help but be a little angry. “You’re embarrassed because you didn’t successfully comprehend the monolith on the first day? Then what about us who have already spent two days?”

Zhexiu could not turn his head, so he calmly looked out the window as he replied. “Idiots?”

Tang Thirty-Six was furious. “If you weren’t a sick patient, I’d kill you.”

Zhexiu emotionlessly replied, “If I didn’t need Chen Changsheng to treat my illness, I’d have killed you at the Grand Examination.”

Chen Changsheng removed some needles from Zhexiu’s neck. “The interlayer of your main governing meridian connecting your sea of consciousness to you has some problems, so every time your sea of consciousness surges, it causes the Tide Rush of Blood. You’ve always used the strength of your will to suppress it, but if your spiritual sense was excessively consumed and you became unable to hold it back, it is extremely possible that the problem within your meridians will erupt. At that point, who would be able to save you?”

Zhexiu understood that Chen Changsheng was advising him to not spend so much time viewing the monoliths or be overly absorbed into it. However, he paid it no attention.

Chen Changsheng continued, “You said before, that compared to getting stronger, living with a clear mind was far more important.”

After a moment’s pause, Zhexiu replied, “Yes, but if I’m not strong enough, I won’t survive for very long in the place I live in.”

It was just like Gou Hanshi had said, cultivating the Dao was all on the individual. Chen Changsheng could not give any good

advice on this sort of matter. Turning to Tang Thirty-Six, he asked, “How was your progress today in comprehending the monoliths?”

Tang Thirty-Six casually replied, “I matched the lines on the monolith to my meridians, then I stimulated my true essence... Since ancient times, the Reflecting Monolith had always been understood in this way. Could there be another?”

Guan Feibai’s mocking voice came from outside the door. “It’s been several thousand years, but you northerners are still using this dim-witted method. No wonder the number of skilled people is becoming less and less. How could the Heavenly Tome Monolith inscriptions be the lines through which true essence travels? It’s obviously better to perceive them with the spiritual sense!”

Chapter 213 - A Myriad Of Monolith Comprehension Methods (Part Three)

Comprehending the monoliths was not deciphering some sort of riddle, because those complex lines and patterns were not a question, but a message. Comprehending the monoliths was understanding the messages on the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. Since the Heavenly Tome Monoliths were not questions, then there were naturally no standard solutions.

It was just like the stars shining upon the many rivers. When the same stars shone upon different rivers, they each would have their own kind of beauty—the inscriptions of the Heavenly Tome Monolith's did not change, but how they were understood was up to each viewer. According to the viewer's scholarly attainments, level of cultivation, and life experiences, identical monolith inscriptions would inevitably be interpreted differently. In that case, what sort of interpretation was correct? It was as mentioned before, there were no standard solutions. The Heavenly Tome Monoliths did not speak, and only used the simplest, yet most mysterious method of judgment.

For however many years the Heavenly Tome Monoliths had rested on the continent, humanity had attempted to understand them. They had already developed countless methods, even schools of thought, for comprehending the monoliths. Even now, there were dozens of schools of thought that were still used or mentioned. There were three most respected methods amongst these that could be considered mainstream.

The school of thought which had the most authority was the

Orthodoxy's Li Palace method. Their method of comprehending the monoliths emphasized clinging to shape, and that the patterns represented the paths through which true essence traveled. The school of the southern sects, namely the Holy Maiden Peak, was to subtly extract the meaning. They believed that the method of understanding the Monolith Inscriptions should not be so inflexible, and believed that they could comprehend the inscriptions through the use of their spiritual sense. The third school's method seemed to balance the special points of both the North and the South on the surface, but in reality, it just as stubbornly believed that the monolith inscriptions were clearly all the results of sword intent, sword forms, and sword moves. This school was known as the technique school.

The method of comprehending the Heavenly Tome Monoliths was an extremely important matter. The disagreements on methods probably played no small role in the splintering of the Orthodoxy into the North and the South. Right up until present times, the Holy Maiden Peak's southern cultivators still held a grudge over the authority that the Li Palace had over the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. Since each of the methods emphasized different things, different cultivators would naturally comprehend different things from the monoliths. The most miraculous thing was that, regardless of whether it was Li Palace's method or the Holy Maiden Peak's method, they both worked in some sense. When cultivators entered the Mausoleum of Books, they would inevitably gain things. The cultivators who succeeded would then firmly believe that the method they had used was the correct one. The other schools of thought simply used tricks; it was believed that even if they succeeded in comprehending the monoliths, they would ultimately be moving farther and farther away from the Great Dao.

As a person of Zhou, Tang Thirty-Six inevitably felt that the Li

Palace's method was correct. Guan Feibai was a disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect, so of course he felt the mind method of comprehending the monoliths was the only correct path. When he heard the tone of Tang Thirty-Six's voice, he could no longer refrain from speaking out. Through the door separating them, he mocked Tang Thirty-Six. Tang Thirty-Six had the sort of temperament where even if someone did not provoke him, he would still insult their close ones. Obviously, in this situation where he was provoked in such a manner, his expression abruptly changed, and he could not hold back anymore. A stream of expletives flew from his lips, and after a few moments, the grass hut became filled with arguments and ceaseless battle.

Some time later, Tang Thirty-Six and Guan Feibai finally got tired, and tranquility was restored. Then, with the door as a divider, the inner room and outer room split into two similar scenes. In the outside room, Guan Feibai, Liang Banhu, and Qi Jian looked at their senior Gou Hanshi. In the inner room, Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu stared at Chen Changsheng in silence.

From the Ivy League Gathering to the Grand Examination, the Orthodox Academy and the Mount Li Sword Sect had been at odds with each other. Regardless of whether it was Chen Changsheng's and Xu Yourong's engagement, or their successive series of battles, the grudges between the two of them were too many to count. Although Zhexiu had come later, he had fought in the Grand Examination with the intent of opening the way for Chen Changsheng, and had defeated Qi Jian and Guan Feibai with a fierce hand. In the eyes of the Mount Li Sword Sect, he was just as deserving of their hate. However, under the control of Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng, this hostile mood did not get out of control. Last night, the two sides had slept under the same roof, but this did not mean the end of their resentments. Now that the debate, or

quarrel, between Tang Thirty-Six and Guan Feibai had escalated up to this point, it was difficult to continue. Naturally, someone had to come in and decide the winner.

Naturally, their hopes rested on the two that had studied the Daoist Canon, Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng..

A gust of night wind came in, causing the wooden door to slowly creak open. The four disciples of the Li Shan Sword Sect and the three from the Orthodox Academy stared at each other in deathly silence.

Gou Hanshi suddenly asked Chen Changsheng, “Which method do you think is the most feasible?”

He did not ask which one was right, because there was no right or wrong for this sort of thing.

Chen Changsheng thought it over, not immediately answering.

The Daoist Canon elaborated on many methods for comprehending the monoliths. As for the three main school, their accounts were even more exhaustive. Since Chen Changsheng had studied the Daoist Canon, he naturally knew these methods by heart. But for some reason, when he had viewed the Reflecting Monolith today, he had purposely not used any of the three methods. Instead, he had walked upon a new, stranger, and inevitably more difficult path.

“I believe...that none of these three methods are necessarily correct.”

He gave an answer that no one had expected. In addition, he had used the word “correct”, indicating that he believed the question to have a right and wrong.

Upon hearing these words, everyone in the grass hut was shocked, including Tang Thirty-Six.

Gou Hanshi frowned. “Don’t tell me you believe the Heavenly Book is indecipherable?”

The Continent had many methods for comprehending the monoliths, but there were also many people, including priests in the Orthodoxy, that believed that the Heavenly Book could not be comprehended. All the attempts to understand the Monolith Inscriptions were absurd and ridiculous. Even if someone possessing incredible wisdom came, they would only be able to understand the message that the Monolith Inscriptions wanted to give them. They would be incapable of seeing the Heavenly Dao’s true meaning.

“No, I only think that the schools of thought today have all deviated from the Heavenly Tome Monolith’s original meaning.”

Chen Changsheng plainly explained, “Regardless of whether it is adhering to the shape, extracting meaning, or imitating techniques, the goals of all these methods of comprehension is to cultivate the Dao. But in reality, the earliest humans that viewed

the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, or more precisely, the first person that ever understood the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, certainly did not know how to cultivate...so I believe all three methods are incorrect.”

The grass hut became very quiet because everyone realized that Chen Changsheng’s argument was very reasonable. But Gou Hanshi shook his head. “Those who cannot cultivate would naturally be unable to comprehend the methods of cultivations, but we can cultivate...it’s just like a child that doesn’t know how to read; hey would never be able to understand the beauty in songs and poems, but we can. According to your logic, wouldn’t we have to completely rid ourselves of our knowledge and turn into ignorant children before we can understand the original meaning of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths?”

Not convinced, Tang Thirty-Six asked, “The child in the bosom is pure and innocent, thus it can be close to the Great Dao. The Daoist Scriptures have always said this...what if that’s true?”

“Discarding the sacred and casting away knowledge doesn’t mean that we would really become idiots.” Qi Jian softly replied.

Gou Hanshi raised his hand, indicating that now was not the time to discuss this question. Turning to Chen Changsheng, he asked, “In that case, what sort of method did you use to comprehend the monolith today?”

Chen Changsheng concealed nothing, relaying the observations he had made of the monolith before dawn, as well as the changes in the scenery that he had observed in the courtyard. “If the

Monolith Inscriptions are unchanging in meaning, why is it that the messages that everyone comprehends are completely different? That's why I believe that the meaning of the Monolith Inscriptions is within these changes."

Gou Hanshi remembered something and asked, "Seven hundred years ago, the Prince of Ruyang Chen Zi entered the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths and wrote an essay on this matter. He seems to have had a similar view on it as you.."

"Yes." Chen Changsheng continued, "The Prince of Ruyang used one year to grasp the meaning of seventeen monoliths. Amongst the imperial family, he would rank in the top ten."

"I still believe that this method is not feasible."

Chen Changsheng seriously asked, "Why?"

"Because the monoliths of the front mausoleum are already extremely complicated. A cool breeze, the starry sky, the scorching sun, the night snow; the changes in light are even harder to keep track of. It's simply impossible to make a thorough examination. The sampling of one person's observations is simply too small. Even if you disregarded all this, you would still need to select a target in order to determine any changes with time. How would you choose this?"

After a moment's thought, Chen Changsheng replied, "Intuition."

Gou Hanshi said nothing more.

The grass hut grew quiet once again.

The Heavenly Book was indecipherable, yet it could also be comprehended at any time. On the surface, it seemed like all the methods described by these youths were all reasonable.

Different cultivators had different methods of comprehending the monoliths, stating this sort of thing was meaningless.

After some hesitation, Qi Jian asked, “How did you think of this method?...It’s too far off the beaten path.”

Chen Changsheng chuckled. “The world has a myriad of monolith comprehension methods. I only have one question: are they easy to be used?”

“It makes sense. It’s just like the dried meat you cooked; regardless of whether it was cooked with sugar or onions and garlic, you only need to ask one question: does it taste good?”

Gou Hanshi smiled, but then he restrained himself. He sternly warned Chen Changsheng, “But I advise you not to tell anyone about this.”

Chen Changsheng was stunned by these words, but then realized what they meant.

If he was still that young daoist from Xining village that had just arrived at the capital, who would care about what method he used to comprehend the monoliths? No one would have paid him any attention. However, by this point his status had gone through a great transformation. In a variety of ways, he had been chosen by the Li Palace. To the eyes of the world, his many actions were possibly a reflection of the Orthodoxy's will.

Zhexiu, who had remained silent this entire time, suddenly opened his mouth. He expressionlessly told the four from the Mount Li Sword Sect, "Now we have to see what you all think."

Gou Hanshi laughed, but said nothing. Although his nature was mild, he still had his own pride.

They all stopped discussing it and began to wash their faces and prepare for bed.

As Chen Changsheng was putting away his notebook, he suddenly thought of something. Walking to the outer room, he handed his notebook over to Gou Hanshi. "Can you take a look at this? I drew it by relying on my senses."

Gou Hanshi felt a bit uneasy. The debate before had been one thing, to give one's notes on the Monolith Inscriptions to another was yet another thing. He thought it over, then took out a small booklet from his chest and handed it to Chen Changsheng. "Before I entered the Mausoleum of Books, I made some preparations. This booklet contains some of my notes."

Chen Changsheng laughed, Gou Hanshi also laughed. The two exchanged glances, then suddenly went quiet. The smiles on their faces slowly disappeared, only to be replaced with expressions of shock.

The youths that had finished washing their faces saw this sort of scene upon returning to the room.

“It should be somewhere in the room.” Gou Hanshi said.

Chen Changsheng replied, “It’s not in the blankets. When I was folding them during the day, I didn’t see any sort of notes. I didn’t even see a sheet of paper.”

Puzzled, Tang Thirty-Six rubbed his wet hair. “What are you guys talking about?”

“Xun Mei’s notebook.” Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi chorused in unison.

Immediately afterwards, they simultaneously turned around to rummage through the things in the room.

Chapter 214 - The Thin Notebook That Tempts People

Liang Banhu and Qi Jian also realized very quickly, and began looking for it with Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi. The grass hut was not big at all, so in that brief amount of time, it had already been completely searched by them. Even the top of the kitchen and the water tank was not neglected. For a while, the dust danced around inside the whole hut.

Tang Thirty-Six on the other hand did not show any reaction, and still thought about what Chen Changsheng had said before. He chased behind him, and constantly asked, "If you rip open the bedsheets, where are we sleeping later? Although the blankets Senior Xun Mei left behind are indeed smelly and hard to put up with, at least there is something to cover up with. I tell you, I will not sleep under that bloody fur skin no matter what. That thing is too hot."

Everybody secretly thought that this young master of the Wenshui Tang family had indeed led an extravagant life ever since he was young, and was different from other people. At this time, he only worried about whether he could sleep comfortably. Most of the Li Shan Sword Sect disciples originated from poor households, and did not like Tang Thirty-Six's normal conduct at all, so right now, they were even more unimpressed with him, they all ignored him.

Chen Changsheng had just finished searching through the fireplace, and his face was covered with soot. Hearing Tang Thirty-Six's whinging behind him, he stopped his actions helplessly and

said, "The new bedding will be delivered in a jiffy, so don't make a fuss out of it."

Only now did Tang Thirty-Six ease his mind slightly, and asked curiously, "What are you looking for?"

Chen Changsheng said, "Didn't I just tell you, it's Senior Xun Mei's notebook."

"What notebook?" Tang Thirty-Six obviously still had not realized.

"His notebook for comprehending the Heavenly Tome Monoliths." Chen Changsheng walked outside, and looked at the wattled fencing. He thought whether it could actually hidden in the ground or not, and if it was, that it would be hard to find.

Only now did Tang Thirty-Six understand why everybody's reactions were so intense. He quickly rolled up his sleeves, and said, "This is something important. We need to find it quickly."

The grass hut quietened down, and only the sounds of overturning boxes and knocking walls remained. However, this quietness did not remain for too long. Tang Thirty-Six's headache-causing voice once again resounded, "I say, if there really is a notebook, who does the notebook belong to?"

Guan Feibai currently stood on the kitchen table, and looked at the beam which the cured meat hung from. After hearing that, he

said in a bad mood, “It belongs to whoever that finds it first.”

Tang Thirty-Six disagreed, and said, “Why so? We obviously moved in here first.”

Qi Jian rubbed away the sweat droplets on his face, and said very seriously, “Last night, when Senior Xun Mei was heavily injured in front of the Divine Path, he said that he left this grass hut to all of us.”

Zhexiu said expressionlessly, “It belongs to whoever that finds it.”

Tang Thirty-Six glanced around, and thought how many people the Li Shan Sword Sect had, and how diligently they were looking for it now. He was scared that they would find it first, so he brought out an idea.

“We should take a step back. No matter who finds it, we can just look at it together.”

Dust flew in the air, and the wattled fencing of the courtyard fell over even more. The grass of the roof was lifted, and even the flooring near the well was lifted. Just as the grass hut was almost taken apart by everybody, a pleasantly surprised shout could finally be heard.

“Found it!”

Everybody was exalted, and rushed into the hut following the sound. They only saw that an extra, thin notebook had appeared in Tang Thirty-Six's hand. Tang Thirty-Six's expression was slightly complicated. He was naturally happy from being able to find the notebook Xun Mei had left behind, but the problem was that he had already suggested beforehand that no matter who found it, they were to look at it together.....

“I'd rather let you guys find it. Perhaps I would be happier.” He placed that thin notebook onto the table, and said regretfully, “Why was I the one who found it?”

“Where was it?” Chen Changsheng asked curiously.

Tang Thirty-Six pointed to the square table behind him and said, “It was placed under the table leg. Did you not see it?”

There was a period of silence. Everybody had already eaten two meals on that small square table in the kitchen, but nobody thought that Xun Mei would actually place such an important notebook under the table leg. Perhaps this was the logic of the darkness under the light. Thinking of how they had risked tearing down the house, they could not help but feel slightly embarrassed.

Liang Banhu looked at Tang Thirty-Six and said, “Who would have thought you had the skill to find things?”

Tang Thirty-Six said, “In the Wenshui Clan, grandpa often uses silver notes to raise the table leg. When I was young, I often went to steal them, so I glanced towards it out of habit. Who thought it

really was under the table leg.”

There was still a period of silence. Including Chen Changsheng, everybody had lost interest in talking to him. They were never people of the same world, so it was very hard to communicate both smoothly and happily.

The dust slowly settled, the tables and chairs were wiped down again. The hut was tidied up, and after everything was completed, the seven people stood around the small square table. Using the slightly dull lamp, they stared at the table top.

Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi raised their heads, and looked into each other's eyes. They thought how Xun Mei had specially left this grass hut for them to live in when he was at death's door. He had also said that he liked tranquility, and did not want too many people to move in. At that time, they felt that it was slightly weird, and only now did they finally understand the deep meaning hidden within.

Xun Mei spent thirty-seven years in the Mausoleum to view monoliths. The most important property he had left behind obviously was not this grass hut, nor the smelly blankets of the three beds, but the thin, old notebook on the table.

As Gou Hanshi lifted open the first page of the notebook, six heads extended forwards. This thin notebook was the notebook of Xun Mei. Inside it, it carried the records of what he had comprehended from the monoliths, and even more importantly, the various ideas and experiments he attempted before comprehending the monolith. Within these densely packed words

carried a whole thirty-seven years of knowledge.

Xun Mei spent thirty-seven years in the Mausoleum of Books, and had comprehended several dozens of Heavenly Tome monoliths. He naturally was unable to record the entire process of comprehending each monolith flawlessly, but just like all the other monolith viewers, the meaning of the first monolith of the front mausoleum, the Reflecting Monolith, was especially different. Several dozens of years ago, the feelings he had experienced when he first saw the stone monolith, as well as the choice of the method he took to comprehend the monolith afterwards and his change in mental state after comprehending the monolith, were all recorded extremely clearly.

The Heavenly Tome Monoliths never changed, but those who viewed the monolith were instead distinct individuals. The method of how a previous person comprehended the monolith naturally could not be used directly by the following people. Otherwise, people like the Sect Elders of the Li Shan Sword Sect would have already personally passed the methods of comprehending the monoliths to disciples like Gou Hanshi. However, the process and valuable experience of previous people who comprehended the monoliths could help the following people to provide a path of mental thought, so they can avoid some of the many deviations the path. Other than the Monolith Guardians who could never leave the mausoleum in their life, and the Saints or members of the Eight Storms of Cardinal Directions that could view the Heavenly Tomes whenever they wished, how many more people were more experienced than Xun Mei who had spent thirty-seven years viewing the monoliths? If this thin notebook were to be circulated, it would definitely become the target for countless organisations to fight over.

The teenagers who sat around the table knew very well that this type of good fortune was naturally incomparably valuable. Staring at those words in the thin notebook, they constantly pondered and gasped as Gou Hanshi turned the pages.

There was silence in the grass hut.

After an unknown amount of time, Gou Hanshi closed the thin notebook. Tang Thirty-Six was deeply absorbed into it, so he stood up and said in alarm, “What are you doing? Hurry up and open it so we can see more.”

Chen Changsheng said, “There is still a lot of time. We can look through it slowly later. There should always be time for digesting it. Also, we haven’t gotten past the first monolith, so just reading this part is enough.”

Only after hearing that did Tang Thirty-Six sit down quietly.

Gou Hanshi gazed at the notebook in front of him and said, “Senior indeed is a senior.”

Everybody else also sighed concurring with his statement.

The notebook had it written down very clearly that Xun Mei had only used two days to comprehend the Reflection Monolith. However, what was even more mind-blowing and had made them show even more admiration was that in the first two days, Xun Mei had actually only tried two methods of comprehension. However,

afterwards in the long period of time he spent viewing monoliths, perhaps he was bored, or perhaps the later monoliths were too hard to comprehend, he once tried comprehending the Reflection Monolith again in his spare time. In the end, he actually discovered seven different methods that could be used to comprehend the Reflection Monolith.. Seven successful ways of comprehension, what kind of idea was that?

As Zhexiu, Guan Feibai and the other three had already spent too long during the day viewing the monoliths in the mausoleum of books, their mental strength was overly exhausted. They had also understood as well as absorbed the experiences in Xun Mei's notebook, so they were all already asleep. As Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi only viewed the monoliths for a limited amount of time, and also because they had already undergone Ethereal Opening, they still had a decent amount of mental strength, they stood in the yard and looked at the sky full of stars. They did not intend to rest.

“I want to go a look at it for a little more.”

Chen Changsheng looked at those stars in the night sky, and thought of the sixth method Xun Mei used mentioned in the notebook. He suddenly had an impulsion and wanted to see the change of the monolith inscriptions under the starlight.

Gou Hanshi, “I also have such an idea.”

When they said go, they went. The two crossed through the orange grove, and walked towards the Mausoleum of Books. Not long after, they arrived in front of the mausoleum. It was the only

path in the mausoleum, and under the brilliance of the star light, it was like a jade belt. It was very pretty.

Just when he was about to ascend the mausoleum, Chen Changsheng suddenly stopped his steps, and looked at him. He asked, “You have already looked at the monoliths for two days, so you should have already comprehended it. Otherwise, it would not make sense.”

Whether it made sense or not, he had already battled against Gou Hanshi three times from the Ivy League Gathering to the Grand Examination, so they were very clear about what types of people each other were. Although he was placed first upon the first banner, he knew that it was just that he did not fear death as much as Gou Hanshi, or that he just feared death more. If they really had the mentioned cultivation level and the knowledge they knew, he was very lacking in comparison to Gou Hanshi.

In the afternoon, Chen Changsheng was sure that he was only a step away from comprehending the monolith, and after looking at Xun Mei’s notes, he was even more sure of this thought. Gou Hanshi had already looked at it for two days, so it would not make sense that he was still unable to comprehend the monolith inscriptions.

Gou Hanshi stayed silent for a while, before saying, “I want to wait for my juniors.”

As long as he wished, he could comprehend the Reflection Monolith whenever he wanted, and move onto the second Heavenly Tome Monolith. Regarding this, he did not want to hide

it from Chen Changsheng.

Just how great of an attraction the Heavenly Tome monoliths had to cultivators could be known from just looking at Zhexiu, Qi Jian and Liang Banhu's pale-faced and senseless look. To purposely slow down his speed of monolith comprehension for the pupils of the same master? If someone else had said that, Chen Changsheng would definitely not believe it, but he was Gou Hanshi.

Chen Changsheng did not like Xu Yourong, and did not regard the marriage contract with any importance at all. However, because of this, he did not have a favorable impression of Qiushan Jun or the Mount Li Sword Sect without question, but he was Gou Hanshi.

Gou Hanshi said, "My other reason is that I am waiting for someone. If nothing goes wrong, you will see him after two days. At that time, I will introduce him to you."

"Are you not curious what the monolith inscriptions of the second Heavenly Tome monolith is like?" Chen Changsheng asked.

Gou Hanshi said, "Of course I want to know. However, just like what Senior Xun Mei has written in the notebook, different methods to comprehend tablets does not mean that it will bring different types of joy. There is no harm in staying back for another two days."

They continued to ascend the mausoleum, and after a short while, they arrived in front of the Reflection Monolith. The

monolith hut under the twilight was very quiet and secluding. A dozen people sat on the rock plateau in the forest, and the arrival of Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi had caused a disturbance. The expressions of the two young scholars in front of the monolith hut immediately became cold, not hiding their animosity at all.

Chapter 215 - Viewing The Monoliths In The Night By Lantern Light (Part One)

The night was dark.

Unlike last night, there were no longer many people sitting intoxicated before the monolith unwilling to leave. Those who still remained in front of the monolith all had relatively strong spiritual senses, thus being able to hold out until now. Chen Changsheng looked as far out as he could and saw two students from the Star Seizer Academy: the senior sister from the Holy Maiden Peak, as well as that girl called Ye Xiaolian. There were also several examinees from the Grand Examination that Chen Changsheng had seen before, but had failed to remember the names or origins of. The most prominent ones were the three scholars from Scholartree Manor that had ended up closest to the monolith. In the dark, their plain white robes were especially eye-catching.

With only a glance, one could tell that there was a problem with this scene—the farther one was from the monolith hut, the stronger their level of cultivation was. He did not know if this was some hidden rule, or if some dispute had already taken place.

The three scholars from Scholartree Manor were closest to the monolith hut.

Zhong Hui stood in front of the hut, viewing the monolith in silence. His two schoolmates stood at his side, watching Chen Changsheng warily. Chen Changsheng was not surprised by this. In the Grand Examination, Zhong Hui had been defeated by Luo

Luo, while Huo Guang had been severely injured by Chen Changsheng to the point where Huo Guang had been unable to continue. The Scholartree Manor's hostility towards the Orthodox Academy was well-deserved.

Gou Hanshi and he had read the experiences that Xun Mei had concealed in his notebook. They had come to view the monolith by the starlight, so they naturally began to move towards the hut. To their surprise, their movement gave rise to another disturbance. A dozen pairs of eyes followed their footsteps, each filled with different emotions—in order to stand in front of the Heavenly Tome Monolith, they would have to take the places currently occupied by the three from Scholartree Manor.

Two Scholartree Manor scholars did not let them through. Looking at Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng, they coldly said, "First come, first served."

These words seemed to be very reasonable, but the crowd outside the hut could only sneer. "Before, you wanted us to let you through because you said that your senior was on the Grand Examination's First Banner. Why didn't you say anything about 'first come, first served' then? Now, that the Grand Examination's first and second place holders have arrived, are you really not going to let them through?"

The two scholars from Scholartree Manor were infuriated by these words.

Only now did Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng realize what had happened here. They both disapproved of the conduct of the

two scholars from Scholartree Manor and continued walking forward, not even glancing at them. Proceeding directly to the front of the monolith hut, they took up positions behind Zhong Hui.

Those two scholars were even more enraged by this. Just as they seemed about to say something, they suddenly remembered the jeers from the crowd. They did not dare speak, much less personally take action.

Zhong Hui took his eyes off the monolith, then turned around and saluted Gou Hanshi. However, when he looked at Chen Changsheng by his side, his eyes did not carry any traces of respect.

No long-reputed young geniuses like Zhong Hui would ever have very good impressions of Chen Changsheng even if Chen Changsheng had broken through into the Ethereal Opening level during the Grand Examination, thus surpassing them in level of cultivation. Instead, they continued to feel that he had merely gotten lucky. It was either that or because he had received the care and attention of several powerful figures in the Orthodoxy.

“I didn’t see you during these past two days, is it that you’re confident you’ll be able to comprehend the monoliths? Or is it that you’ve realized that you’ve used up all your luck, like a fragile, damaged vase that has finally fallen to pieces?”

Zhong Hui looked at him with an indifferent expression. “In previous years, the first rank in the First Banner of the Grand Examination took, at the very least, five days to comprehend this

first Heavenly Tome Monolith. You are this year's first rank of the First Banner. If you spend too much time on this, it will cause the rest of us to lose face. I hope you don't disappoint me."

Chen Changsheng had been viewing the starlit monolith, his heart and soul engrossed in studying the changes amongst those complex lines. Chen Changsheng was very perplexed by what Zhong Hui had said, so he very casually asked, "We don't really know each other, so even if I can't comprehend this Heavenly Tome Monolith, what does that have to do with you? Why would you be disappointed?"

Zhong Hui was stunned by these words. Taking a deep breath, he could barely restrain his anger as he said, "It seems like you have quite the mouth."

Chen Changsheng did not respond, instead walking directly to his side and saying, "Excuse me, could you move?"

Zhong Hui had been standing in the best position. He was closest to the monolith and was not obstructing the starlight. At Chen Changsheng's words, he could no longer suppress the anger in his heart and clenched his hands into fists.

To everyone there, Chen Changsheng's first sentence was clearly to disregard Zhong Hui, while the second sentence was to politely put his foot down. Even those people that had previously jeered and ridiculed those Scholartree Manor scholars also believed that Chen Changsheng was humiliating Zhong Hui. Only Gou Hanshi realized by looking at Chen Changsheng's expression that he was not setting out to humiliate Zhong Hui, but really just wanted

Zhong Hui to move.

He shook his head and followed Chen Changsheng to Zhong Hui's side.

His robe trembled in the night wind as Zhong Hui's wrath reached a boiling point. His two fellow schoolmates were the same. The three were ready to attack Chen Changsheng at any time. However, when Gou Hanshi walked up between them and Chen Changsheng, they had no choice but to cool their tempers somewhat as they thought about the gap that lay between Meditation and Ethereal Opening...They were no match for Gou Hanshi. In other words, they were also no match for Chen Changsheng.

Since they could not beat him, their anger had no power. Although the two scholars from Scholartree Manor remained furious, Zhong Hui forced himself to calm down, then backed up several steps, letting Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng through. Looking at Chen Changsheng's back, Zhong Hui said nothing, but the signs of a sneer appeared at the corners of his mouth. It was precisely as he had said before: these past two days, Chen Changsheng had rarely been seen in front of the monolith hut. To him, this was definitely all a pretense. He thought it impossible that Chen Changsheng would have the same sort of luck that carried him through the Grand Examination. Could it be that he would still be able to see a pattern in this monolith?

The starlight illuminated the Reflecting Monolith, making those complex lines seem lined with a layer of silver, as if mercury was slowly flowing through them. A vivid sensation that was hard to

describe appeared before Chen Changsheng's eyes. He did not use his spiritual sense, did not move his true essence through his meridians in accordance with those lines, nor did he attempt to extract some sort of sword form from the direction of the lines; he only calmly looked at it, perceived it, experienced it. He had confirmed that the picture he had seen at dawn was real, and that the picture made using his spiritual sense while daydreaming in the afternoon in that courtyard was also true. A smile gradually emerged on his face.

“Did you get something?” Gou Hanshi asked, somewhat surprised in his change of expression.

Chen Changsheng nodded. “I was originally a little hesitant because I felt it was too simple, but there were parts in the notebook that reminded me of something.”

“You’re still persevering on using the most primitive method of understanding?”

“It might be less intelligent it might be slower, but it fits me the best.”

Silence reigned around the monolith hut. Everyone was listening in, including Zhong Hui. Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi were publicly acknowledged as two of the world's most erudite scholars of the Daoist Canon. When discussing the methods to comprehend the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, how could they miss the experience? Only, what was that notebook that Chen Changsheng had mentioned?

“What is this most primitive method of comprehension? To make the lines into numbers?” The senior sister from the Holy Maiden Peak, who knew Gou Hanshi well, asked curiously as she stepped forward.

Gou Hanshi glanced at Chen Changsheng.

“We think that the most primitive method discards everything about true essence, spiritual sense, and sword moves. It’s not turning lines into numbers, but...” Chen Changsheng turned around to look at the girl from Holy Maiden Peak as he seriously spoke. He was prepared to speak about his insights, explain his theories, that the true meaning of the Heavenly Tomes was hidden within the changes, when unexpectedly...

A cold admonishment rose up from the night.

“Ridiculous!”

A middle-aged man had at some point arrived, the expression on his face abnormally cold.

Upon seeing this man, Zhong Hui and the other two from Scholartree Manor suddenly became happy. They rapidly approached and paid him respects. “We have seen Martial Uncle.”

Chen Changsheng realized that the middle-aged man was the Monolith Guardian that had severely reprimanded him at dawn.

Only now did he realize that this man had originally been a senior from the Scholartree Manor.

That middle-aged man walked to the front of the monolith hut. Staring at Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng, he sternly shouted at them, “Supposedly, your two juniors are masters of the Daoist Canon, but I didn’t think that you were actually just two ignorant children, only knowing how to talk a lot of nonsense!”

Chapter 216 - Viewing The Monoliths In The Night By Lantern Light (Part Two)

Now that the middle-aged man had appeared, one of the Scholartree Manor's students regained his arrogance. He introduced the man to the surrounding onlookers. "This is my martial uncle from Scholartree Manor, Ji Jin. More than twenty years have passed since he offered his Dao to the Mausoleum of Books."

The young examinees were all startled by these words and one by one stepped forward to pay their respects. It must be known that in the past, Ji Jin had been one of the south's most famous scholars, possessing exceptional gifts. Who would have thought that he had actually become a Monolith Guardian?

This martial uncle, from the Scholartree Manor, called Ji Jin paid no attention to the respects and bows of these juniors. While throwing Chen Changsheng an exceptionally cold stare, he strode before him and Gou Hanshi.

"To take the shape is to refine true essence, to take the idea is to stimulate the spiritual sense, to take the form is to imitate sword moves; the world only recognizes these three methods as authentic. All other methods, regardless of how bizarre they are, equally serve as the foundation for these three. If you really plan on discarding them all, then I want to know, what sort of method do you have? In the many years past, there have been countless people overconfident in their intelligence, always thinking that their predecessors were only mediocre and that they could easily surpass them. How could these people understand that with such

an unrealistic mindset, that they were already travelling down a limited path?”

He stared at Chen Changsheng, his voice harsh and uncompromising. “Don’t think that just because you obtained first place on the first banner in the Grand Examination that you’re entitled to look down on all these others in this holy and sacred Mausoleum of Books, that has attained first rank on the first banner and more! Who would dare to be as arrogant as you, wanting to reach enlightenment as fast possible. Otherwise you would definitely be battered and bruised here.”

Everything around the monolith hut sat in silence. Only Ji Jin’s cold and oppressive voice rang out. In the eyes of the senior from the Holy Maiden Peak, the two students from the Star Seizer Academy, as well as all the other students present, Senior Ji Jin was a Monolith Guardian worthy of great respect from all Daoists. His understanding of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths was far beyond that of anyone outside the mausoleum. Although his words were harsh, they were also reasonable. Although Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi could be considered well-read, even erudite, in the Daoist Canons, they were still young. Especially in the domain of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, when faced with such harsh yet substantive criticisms, what else could do they except humbly receive this advice?

Yet as time passed, the atmosphere in front of the monolith hut grew increasingly tense.

Because while Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi had not said anything, they also had not clearly acknowledged their mistakes.

The Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education's building was not very eye-catching. It was completely engulfed by the dozens of tall red fir trees around it, but even those trees were incapable of shutting out the night sky. This was why the dozens of stone steps were illuminated by the starlight, as if covered by a layer of snow.

His Eminence, Archbishop Mei Lisha, stood in front of the window, gazing at the white steps as his right hand twirled a winter plum flower behind him. It was the beginning of spring, but for some reason this winter plum flower had just blossomed.

“The Empress' mind was vast and broad, able to hold the entire world, thus she needn't care about the Orthodox Academy, needn't care about how far that child called Chen Changsheng could go...of course, most importantly, the Empress was too powerful. Even if that child were to come across a stroke of luck, he would still be but an ant in the Empress' eyes. If she wanted to crush him, she could do so at any time, but there were still many people that were not as strong as the Empress, so naturally they cannot be as open-minded. So they will fear, they will be afraid of those matters of the past, such as the reversal of the verdict in the Orthodox Academy.”

Mei Lisha's wizened face exuded a faint sense of ridicule. “No matter if it's people from the Tianhai clan or those dogs that the Empress uses to gnaw people to death, along with the Pope's attitude, the fear in their hearts grows ever stronger and they grow increasingly wary of the Orthodox Academy and Chen Changsheng. Naturally, they have no desire to see him continue to shine. Since they themselves are unable to act, they invited a southerner that they had known for many years, yet this is to be

expected. It's just that I didn't think that a person like Ji Jin would deign to act."

After Priest Xin's conversation with Chen Changsheng earlier that day, he had felt that the situation was a little strange. After investigating, he quickly returned to report. Standing before the bishop, he was stunned by these words. His face carried a fierce expression as it shuddered. With disbelief apparent in his voice, he asked, "Who would dare do such a reckless thing in the Mausoleum of Books?"

"Upon entering the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths and comprehend the Dao, the most important asset is the mindset. Those people do not need to personally take action to deal with Chen Changsheng, just disturb his mindset, thus affecting his cultivation. The experience of entering the Mausoleum of Books for the first time, for one's cultivation, is irreplaceable and impossible to reverse."

Mei Lisha's eyes gradually grew small, his expression cold. "Even if we're not speaking in the long-run, only at the moment, if Chen Changsheng's cultivation were to be affected, if he were unable to obtain sufficient gains in the Mausoleum of Books, even if he were to enter the Garden of Zhou a month later, he would not be able to reap much. In fact, it would be extremely dangerous."

Only now did Priest Xin understand that the seemingly unremarkable hostility and scorn that some in the Mausoleum of Books held actually concealed such ruthlessness. He took in a breath of cold air and somewhat hurriedly said, "I will immediately send someone over to tell Mister Nian Guang to keep

watch over Ji Jin and the others.”

“Nian Guang, huh...He might not necessarily like Chen Changsheng.”

Mei Lisha frowned, then said a little roughly, “If he had not been so fiercely coerced by the Orthodox Academy that year, how could that outstanding student from the Temple Seminary be willing to spend the rest of his life in the Mausoleum of Books?”

Priest Xin asked worriedly, “Then what should we do?”

“You can still tell Nian Guang, but I think that in the end, I want Chen Changsheng to overcome this problem himself, in fact...I’m really quite curious. That child stayed for a day in the Pavilion of Ascending Mist, then played tourist for a day, then made meals for a day. When he finally arrives before the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, what will he see?”

The main residence of the sumptuous mansion grounds was filled with the sounds of music and laughter. This was not the Tianhai clan’s main residence, but was Tianhai Shengxue’s own home, so there was no elder to take notice.

Tomorrow, Tianhai Shengxue would once again set off for Snowhold Pass. All the young nobles of the capital’s princes and dukes, that he was friends with, had come to send him off. With the wine flowing freely, it was hard to avoid the subject of the recently concluded Grand Examination, as well as the young people that had recently entered the Mausoleum of Books.

Towards the beginning, the subject of Tianhai Shengxue's odd withdrawal from the Grand Examination was still fresh in the minds of those young nobles, so they tiptoed carefully around the subject, but after three rounds of drinks, they gradually became too intoxicated to restrain themselves, and their conversations gradually began to ridicule and shame Chen Changsheng and even the Li Palace.

Tianhai Shengxue had nothing to say, only smiling upon hearing their words. At the midpoint of the feast, he turned to Prime Minister Yu Wenjing's son and excused himself, got up, and walked towards the rear of residence. In the rear residence, there was someone waiting for him. This was a person even younger than him and their bloodline was even more distinguished. Normally, he would never have invited this person to come to his drinking parties, sometimes going as far as avoiding him if possible.

"The people in my family are ready to go crazy. Could it be that you also think I've gone mad?" Tianhai Shengxue looked at Prince Chen Liu and frowned. "You're worried that Chen Changsheng will be suppressed in the Mausoleum of Books, but your worries are redundant. The Empress hasn't said anything and the Pope has made his position clear. Who would dare to touch him? It's not like he's offended Zhou Tong."

Prince Chen Liu's handsome face was fraught with anxiety. "You're right, there are people in the Mausoleum of Books that are attempting to disrupt Chen Changsheng's viewing of the monoliths, and Zhou Tong is really waiting outside the mausoleum for him."

Chapter 217 - Viewing The Monoliths In The Night By Lantern Light (Part Three)

When Tianhai Shengxue had said that these people were about to go crazy, he was not referring to the nonsense-babbling young nobles who were feasting, but their parents, as well as his parents—those people had invited a southerner to disrupt Chen Changsheng's viewing of the monoliths. The Mausoleum of Book was too important to cultivators. Everyone knew that one slow step would leave them a step behind for the rest of the journey.

However, he did not care too much about it. This was because in the Grand Examination, through Her Highness Luoluo, he had secretly bet on Chen Changsheng. It was also because, although the reason for why the Pope highly regarded Chen Changsheng was still a mystery, there must certainly have been a reason for such high regard. For someone who could fight evenly with Ethereal Opening Realm cultivators, as long as they could not destroy his physical body, it would be almost impossible for them to destroy his spirit. This was how Tianhai Shengxue saw it, but now that he had heard Prince Chen Liu's words and heard Zhou Tong's name, only then did he finally realize that he had underestimated the strength of the older generation.

The people of the world said that Zhou Tong was a dog raised by the Divine Empress, but he was no normal dog. Rather, he was the fiercest dog in all of history. Ever since the Judgement Board of the Orthodoxy had been placed under the authority of the Ministry of Personnel, his power and influence had risen to the heavens. Who knew how many ministers and generals had died by his hands? As for who the ministers of the old royal family and the elders of the Orthodoxy loathed the most? It was not the Divine Empress, but

him.

Several decades ago, many powerful experts had risked their lives to assassinate him, but not one of them succeeded. As for why this was the case, Zhou Tong always kept numerous sinister and terrible defensive weapons on his person. Moreover, Zhou Tong himself was at the Star Condensation realm. Logically, a cultivator at this realm should have a calm and bright state of mind, no longer concerned with mortal affairs. Even less would they deign to perform such sordid and bloody matters such as interrogation, torture, murder, and search and seizure, but Zhou Tong was just that type of eccentric creature. His interest, no, his goal in life, was in these sordid affairs, not cultivation.

This sort of man could not be moved by the Tianhai family. If he really was waiting outside the Mausoleum of Books for Chen Changsheng, it was, by necessity, a reflection of the Divine Empress' will. Tianhai Shengxue pondered this in silence, when suddenly, he felt that something was off. The Divine Empress' manner had been confident and open-minded. Even if she were to act against Chen Changsheng and the revolutionary countercurrent he represented, she would only do so after his return from Zhou Garden.

Thinking up to this point, he lifted his head and looked at Prince Chen Liu's furrowed brows. He thought to himself that she had purposefully sent Zhou Tong ahead of time. In the end, what was she hoping to accomplish?

The fallout from the Grand Examination had not completely dispersed yet. Within the capital, countless powers were carefully

watching the Mausoleum of Books. Within the inns and taverns, common folk also discussed this matter. They were curious about the situation of all the examinees in the Mausoleum of Books, especially Chen Changsheng. Yet they would never have thought that within the Mausoleum of Books, due to specific circumstances, the disciples of the Orthodox Academy and the Li Shan Sword Sect were living under one roof, nor would they have imagined that Chen Changsheng had gone together with Gou Hanshi to view the monoliths. Just like how those examinees around the monolith hut did not think that after Ji Jin had finished his criticisms, Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi did not appear to humbly accept this advice, nor did they seem ready to admit fault.

Under the dim moonlight, the monolith hut seemed rather eerie. The atmosphere with stifling and tense. The young cultivators did not know what to say. The anger on the faces of Zhong Hui and the other two from Scholartree Manor continued to grow while Ji Jin maintained his icy expression. At this moment, Chen Changsheng broke the silence, saying something that no one anticipated.

He looked at Ji Jin and said, “Senior, you are wrong.”

These word immediately caused an uproar. A fifteen-year-old youth actually dared to point out to a Monolith Guardian, who had been viewing monoliths for far more than fifteen years, that his method of comprehending the monoliths was wrong?! Even if he was this year’s first rank in the First Banner of the Grand Examination, it was just as Ji Jin had said. Every year, the Mausoleum of Books would welcome another first rank of the First Banner from the Grand Examination. In this place, how could Chen Changsheng even compare with Ji Jin?

The next thing that happened caused the people viewing the monoliths to become even more shocked. After a brief moment of silence, Gou Hanshi also said a few word to Ji Jin. “Senior, you really are wrong.”

The night was dark. Although the stars twinkled in the night sky, to clearly make out all those complex lines was still rather strenuous. Some time before, someone had quietly lit an oil lantern that had been hanging off of a tree outside the monolith hut. The dim light of the lantern mixed with the starlight and fell on the youthful faces of Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi, both calm and resolute.

They knew that what Ji Jin had just said was actually very reasonable. The so-called ten thousand changes but never straying from the original. It was true that the commonly seen methods for comprehending the monoliths, if traced back to the source, would never be able to escape the confines of the three most mainstream and most orthodox methods: take the shape, take the idea, and take the form, but they were both well-read in the Daoist Canons and they had also taken a look at Xun Mei’s notebook, so they were even more confident that they would manage to find a new path.

“Before the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, there are no set methods and no set rules.”

Gou Hanshi looked around at the young examinees as he spoke. “Correct, right now the only standard methods that we can instantly call to mind are all variations of the three mainstream methods, but it cannot be believed that the countless ways to

comprehend the monoliths, all of which have already been realized by our predecessors. If we were to think in such a way, then how would we have ever surpass them?”

Back at the Li Shan Sword Sect, he had often played the role of a teacher for his juniors, so these words came very naturally to him.

Hearing these words, Ji Jin’s expression became more and more heavy. He felt that this was the unyielding provocation of the younger generation. He coldly retorted, “The current junior generation seems to be getting more and more arrogant. What often occurs when they want to surpass their worthy predecessors, just like that madman that only knew how to paint armor! But don’t forget, if you’re as arrogant as him, in the end you’ll end up possessed by madness.”

“To cultivate the Dao is to look at the worthy and unworthy, not early and late.”

Gou Hanshi calmly told him, “If those who came later didn’t have the courage to surpass those who came before, then how could each generation become stronger than the last?”

When Ji Jin had received the message from his alma mater, it only further inflamed his inborn loathing for Chen Changsheng to extreme heights, which was why he had, from early morning until late night, confronted Chen Changsheng in order to humiliate him. He could not have imagined that Gou Hanshi would come to refute him. In the south, the Scholartree Manor had deep roots and long bloodlines, but in the end it still could not compare with the Li Shan Sword Sect, the number one monastery of the Longevity

Sect. He did not want to argue with Gou Hanshi, but he was also burning with rage and was being watched by all these members of the younger generation, so how could he take into consideration these other factors? Rebuke apparent in his voice, he said. “The Dao of the Heavenly Tomes lies within the Monolith Inscriptions. You’ve only been in the mausoleum for two days, so what Dao can you have understood? What sort of justification have you cooked up? You insist on taking the wrong path to failure?”

Chen Changsheng replied, “Ten thousand streams, each with a different scenery, but in the end they all join the ocean.”

Ji Jin stared into his eyes as he callously said, “I hear that during the Grand Examination you managed to break into the Ethereal Opening Realm, shaking the entire capital. Presumably you think yourself to be one of those bubbling clear streams, but don’t forget! Many streams initially seem to have an abundance of water, but when they leave the mountain, after a few days they dry out in the wasteland, so for what reason would you be able to escape this type of end?”

Up to here, the hostility had already transformed into barely concealed insults, even curses. The onlookers all turned pale at these words, and even the oil lantern hanging on the tree seemed to grow dimmer.

Chen Changsheng could not help but shake his head at these words. “In the past, I heard that senior was a famous talent of the south who willingly offered his life to Dao, making you even more worthy of praise. I didn’t think that you were this sort of person who resorts to threats when he can’t speak reason. It would seem

that not one bit of the graceful bearing from the past remains.”

He was not returning Ji Jin’s ridicule, but rather really thought this way. His face naturally contained some sorrow and disappointment, but in the eyes of everyone else, it was an expression of ridicule against Ji Jin.

Ji Jin flew into a rage at these words. Pointing at him, he yelled, “You want to talk reason, then we’ll talk reason! Since ancient times, of the countless methods used to comprehend the Reflecting Monolith, which of them was a part of the ocean that is the ‘correct path’? Who could not take the shape, could not take the idea, or could not take the form to open this monolith? Was it Zhou Dufu or His Majesty Taizong? Was it the previous generation’s Holy Maiden or His Holiness the Pope? Or was it that person surnamed Su from Mount Li? Or maybe it was that principal from the Orthodox Academy?”

The speed of his voice became faster and faster. As he spoke the names of these outstanding and famous personages, he was almost like a hurricane, rushing forth with skull-crushing speed. The last two names were seniors of Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi. The last name of the principal of the Orthodox Academy especially seemed to contain some hidden subtext.

The area around the monolith hut became completely silent. Likewise, Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng also said nothing. As for how those legendary figures that Ji Jin had mentioned ultimately comprehended the monoliths, no one knew the exact details. According to the Daoist Canons and official government records, they had all used the conventional methods, that is the

most orthodox methods. The year Zhou Dufu had used one glance to comprehend the monoliths, he had afterwards revealed his method in idle chatter with Taizong. He had taken from both shape and idea and combined them into a high-level method, but it was still within accepted practice.

Just as everyone felt that Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng would be left speechless in the face of these cold hard facts, Chen Changsheng once again spoke.

The oil lantern on the branch gently flickered about due to the night wind. The light swayed to and fro, reflecting from his eyes, almost as if there were stars twinkling within them.

“One thousand one hundred and sixty-one years ago, His Majesty Taizong came to the capital from Tianliang county to view the monoliths. That year, he was accompanied by the Duke of Wei, who, back then, was the official secretary of the county. His Majesty Taizong used only one day to view three monoliths, whereas the Duke of Wei needed two whole months to understand just this Reflecting Monolith. Of course, everyone knew that the Duke of Wei didn’t know how to cultivate. Logically, it would be correct to say that there was no way for him to understand the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, so His Majesty Taizong did not laugh, but rather was baffled at how he managed to comprehend the monolith. He asked the Duke of Wei just what he had seen in the Reflecting Monolith. The Duke of Wei replied that he did not see the flow of true essence, the traces of spiritual sense, nor did he see any sword forms or moves...”

Chen Changsheng pointed at the unspeaking monolith as he

recounted this ancient and long forgotten tale. Everyone's gaze, including Ji Jin's followed his finger, resting upon the inscription on the monolith. They wanted to know in the end, what had the Duke of Wei seen? Could it be that there were actually methods outside the three main methods?"

"He saw a forcefully twisted straight line. He saw the pain and helplessness of that formerly straight line that had been forcefully distorted by external forces. He saw what was hidden within the fold was the power of straightness. In his eyes, the lines on the Reflecting Monolith had nothing to do with cultivation. It was beyond cultivation. Those lines were the law. They were rules."

There was naught but silence in front of the monolith hut. Only Chen Changsheng's voice resounded.

"In this way, the Duke of Wei comprehended the Heavenly Tome Monolith."

Chapter 218 - How Much Do You Know About The Past? (Part One)

Chen Changsheng had finished with his story.

After a moment of silence, the area erupted with discussion. The gazes directed towards Ji Jin were now rather complicated. Previously, this Senior had harshly asked if, among the countless methods of comprehending the Reflecting Monolith from ancient times up until now, there existed a correct path that deviated from the ocean. But now it would seem that the method which the Duke of Wei had used to comprehend the Heavenly Tome Monolith back then was completely different from the orthodox methods. How could he respond?

Ji Jin's face grew unsightly, as he had also just recalled the legend about Duke of Wei viewing the monoliths. He could not deny the existence of this story. While the history books had no records of it, the Mausoleum of Books did. As a Monolith Guardian, he had personally seen them. The Duke of Wei truly had comprehended the Heavenly Tome Monoliths as being laws, which was why he later on became the protector of the rites of Zhou, the admonishing king, before finally becoming a trusted minister. Only Ji Jin was unwilling to be convinced by this junior. With a heavy voice, he said, "When the Duke of Wei saw the lines of the Monolith Inscriptions and understood them as laws, he still formed his ideas by observing its shape, and then used these ideas to stimulate his spiritual sense."

Everyone grew restless at these words. Several young examinees at the back of the crowd shook their heads. The shape and idea

spoken of in the three mainstream methods were completely different from the shape and idea said just now. The Duke of Wei had never cultivated once in his entire life. He had only relied on his courage and insight, not any sort of spiritual sense. With these words, it seemed like Ji Jin had just resorted to sophistry.

Seeing people's reactions to his words, Ji Jin got even angrier. But before he could say anything else, Gou Hanshi spoke up once more.

“I have also thought of a story. This story was recorded in the “Tales on Returning to the Origin”, not within the Daoist Canon. I read it when I was small. If it wasn't for Chen Changsheng bringing up the Duke of Wei, I probably would have forgotten about it. This story was about the Leader of the Way, who posed a question to a woodcutter.”

Everyone was astonished. The Leader of the Way asked a question to a woodcutter? How had they never heard of this before?

Gou Hanshi continued, “In those days, the world was strife-ridden. The teachings of the Way had not yet been established, much less the Orthodoxy, but the first leader of the Way was already a powerful expert at an extremely high level of cultivation. He had entered the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths multiple times, attempting to comprehend a part of the true meaning of the Heavenly Dao each time. But although he obtained some gain every time, he found himself well short when he wanted to ascend to the summit of the mausoleum. On a certain day, the Leader of the Way was stroking a monolith while looking at the

peak of the mausoleum, filled with regret that his career as a Daoist had finally reached its limit, that in this life, it would be incredibly difficult for him to proceed another step. Then, to his surprise, he saw a woodcutter descending from the mausoleum summit, a bundle of firewood on his back. The Leader of the Way was struck by the oddness of this scene. “If I could not reach the top of the mausoleum,” he thought to himself, “The other experts of the continent who have similar cultivations also can’t reach it. In that case, how did this woodcutter, who clearly can’t cultivate and whose body is aged and feeble, walk to the mausoleum summit as he pleased?”

The hut fell into silence once more. Their minds had all been mesmerized by this never before heard story. “Could it be,” they thought to themselves, “That this woodcutter was really an expert of the Heavenly Dao, that perhaps he had even entered into the legendary Realm of Grand Liberation?”

“The Leader of the Way sincerely asked for instruction. The woodcutter replied that his ancestor had made their living off cutting wood from this mountain since ages ago. The Leader of the Way strenuously inquired, how was he able to find his way through the mausoleum? After a long period of hesitation, the woodcutter brought the Leader of the Way in front of a monolith. He told him that the path through the mausoleum was all on this monolith, that he would just need to walk according to its instructions...After he said these words, the woodcutter descended from the mountain.”

Gou Hanshi paused, then continued, “The Leader of the Way pondered before that monolith for dozens of days and nights, but he failed to find any sort of path amongst those lines. Then, one

night, he had a sudden realization. He gave three hearty laughs, and with a brush of his sleeves, he flew straight to the summit of the mausoleum. There, he comprehended the entirety of the Heavenly Dao, and founded the Daoist school. Even after he'd reached his later years and had finally returned to the sea of stars, he still could never forget how he could never see the path on the Heavenly Tome Monolith that the woodcutter had seen..."

This story had also come to an end.

Only silence surrounded the monolith hut.

Ji Jin's face extremely unsightly as he retorted. "Leaving aside what sort of method the woodcutter used to see the path in the inscriptions and only speaking about the 'Tales of Returning to the Origin' that this story was recorded in...What sort of book is 'Tales of Returning to the Origin'? If it is not to be found in the Daoist Canon, how can we trust it? Don't tell me you randomly made up a story to prove that I was wrong?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "The 'Tales of Returning to the Origin' is a collection of the First Leader of the Way's conversations from the one hundred years before he returned to the sea of stars. As for the why it wasn't included in the Daoist Canon, it's because one thousand five hundred thirty-seven years after the establishment of the Orthodoxy, the descendants of the first Leader of the Way attempted a schism within the Way. They were then accused of the sin of treason, and their traces were purged. That is why this book is not included in the Daoist Canon. However, it is still a true part of the Canon. The original copy is still probably in Li Palace. We can consult it at any time."

Gou Hanshi had wanted to say exactly this. He exchanged glances with Chen Changsheng for a second, and slightly nodded his head. They were both young people that had read the Daoist Canon in depth, so they could respond off of each other. It really was a good sort of feeling. While the troubles, or even grudges, between Chen Changsheng and the Mount Li Sword Sect were hard to resolve, Gou Hanshi held no enmity for him. Chen Changsheng also saw Gou Hanshi in an increasingly better light. The reason why they liked each other was largely because of their knowledge of the Daoist Canon.

Everyone knew that Gou Hanshi's knowledge of the Daoist Canon was profound. After the first night of the Ivy Festival, Chen Changsheng's reputation in this field had also become widespread. At this moment, the former narrated while the latter supplemented. And when Chen Changsheng explained that the original copy could be found at the Li Palace and could at any time be consulted, everyone there believed it without a doubt. At this point, Ji Jin's face had grown extremely unsightly, and even seemed a little ashen.

“Enough.” Accompanied by a cold voice, a white-robed Monolith Guardian appeared.

This Monolith Guardian's hair was all white and his age advanced. Those young examinees who knew him spoke in disbelief. “Mister Nian Guang.”

Chen Changsheng had to ask Gou Hanshi before he understood. This Mister Nian Guang had originated from the Temple

Seminary. He had cultivated since he was a child and had become rather well-known in the cultivation world. Yet, for some reason, after he had obtained qualifications from a certain Grand Examination, he had entered the Mausoleum of Books and took the vows to become a Monolith Guardian, and never again emerged.

Nian Guang looked at Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng and indifferently said, “Neither the Duke of Wei nor the woodcutter cultivated, yet the two of you are cultivators. When you view the monoliths, it is for the purpose of asking the Heavenly Dao, not for laws or finding the real path up. Sir Ji Jin’s words are not necessarily without reason. Of course, for you two to persevere in opening a new path is truly a courageous course of action, and not necessarily inappropriate.”

From hearing these words, everyone there understood that this virtuous and upstanding personage had come to settle the dispute.

Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng clasped their hands in respect and said nothing more.

Nian Guang then turned to Ji Jin with a slight frown. His voice seemed to take pity on him, yet also seemed so angry. “Back then, you only took a few years to comprehend the first seventeen monoliths of the mausoleum, and we all praised you for your mind as tranquil as water. But now, what has happened to you? Even if your alma mater paid offerings to our cultivation, how could you waste time on such ordinary affairs from outside the mausoleum?”

Ji Jin had attempted to humiliate Chen Changsheng not just because of the urgings of outside forces, but also because he

himself had wanted to. Now that Nian Guang had appeared, he was still unreconciled, yet also knew that there were no words that would let him take back control. He coldly said, “The Orthodoxy seems to really value this young one. They actually allowed someone like you, who has been wronged by the Orthodoxy Academy, to appear.”

Nian Guang frowned.

Ji Jin turned towards Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi and indifferently said, “These words and debate are ultimately meaningless. Your words may seem like a deluge of heavenly flowers, but they might turn out to be a pile of dog shit. Forty-four people from the Grand Examination entered the mausoleum this year. I would really like to see who will be the first to comprehend this Reflecting Monolith in the end, and who will be able to comprehend the largest amount of them.”

Tonight, Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng had come to view the monoliths by lantern light, not to take part in a debate. They were also not terribly interested in who would be the first to comprehend the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. As a result, they did not respond to Ji Jin’s provocative and disdainful words, nor did they say anything. However, that did not mean all their peers had such a good temperament.

A bright and especially frivolous voice rose up from the mountain path.

“One hundred years ago, in place of the prior emperor, the Divine Empress ascended to the summit of the mausoleum to offer

sacrifices to the heavens. As she carried out this task, she happened to see the monolith that had been set before the Mausoleum of Books, upon which were inscribed the names of those who had comprehended the Heavenly Tome Monoliths the fastest throughout history. This monolith displeased her, because to her, to view the Heavenly Tome Monoliths was to catch a glimpse of the Heavenly Dao. To decide who came first and last and then write these names on a list was extremely vulgar. Hence, she ordered Sir Zhou Tong to personally take up a hatchet and hack off the names on that monolith. I didn't think that there would be someone who, despite remembering the actions of that year, would talk such nonsense here within the mausoleum tonight. Could it be that you resent the Empress's decree? Or is that your ignorance has reached the extent where you fail to realize that your proposal profanes the Mausoleum of Books?"

Everyone knew about this piece of history. But truthfully speaking, while that ranking on the monolith was already no more, it existed within the hearts of all cultivators. No one could forget those once highly-placed names, such as Zhou Dufu, or His Holiness the Pope, or Wang Zhice. It was just as Ji Jin had said previously, nobody cared that the listing was no more. It was only that this person coming up from the mountain path did not care for their opinions and raised the Divine Empress's decree up high. His pompous voice went so as far as to render everyone speechless. As for denouncing the Empress's decree, who would dare?

Hearing this voice, Chen Changsheng shook his head. Gou Hanshi also recognized the voice and made a somewhat sour smile. The two retreated to the side. They knew that since that guy had arrived, seemingly ready to start a war of words, their turns would not come.

Ji Jin did not know who was coming, but his face became extremely gloomy and seemed about to start dripping with water. Zhong Hui and his two companions from Scholartree Manor also became extremely angry.

Along with the appearance of the youth, the dusky light emanating from the oil lantern on the tree abruptly got brighter. This was because the youth's belt was inlaid with dozens of precious gems, and also because the sword sheath at his waist was also embedded with a gem. The gems shined with light, just like the youth's handsome face.

The eyes of the senior from Holy Maiden Peak also lit up.

Tang Thirty-Six had arrived. He looked at the gloomy-faced Ji Jin and arched his brow. "Could it be that you believe my words are unreasonable? Then why don't you go the Palace of Great Brilliance and ask the Divine Empress what she thinks?"

Nian Guang frowned. His disapproval evident, he declared, "Enough."

When this virtuous and upstanding Monolith Guardian had previously spoken the words "Enough", Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng had spoken no more, but Tang Thirty-Six was not that sort of person. In actuality, his brows leapt up even higher as he said, "Sir shouldn't think about glossing things over, nor should he thinking about parading his seniority before me. This is the Mausoleum of Books. Fighting isn't allowed, so why should I be scared of you?"

Nian Guang paused at these words.

Tang Thirty-Six turned back to Ji Jin. “Similarly, you can’t fight, let alone kill me. If I mock you with a few words, what can you do about it? Do you want to trade insults with me? Don’t think I’m as taciturn as Chen Changsheng, or a flowery-speaking hypocrite like Gou Hanshi. With regards to insulting others, you really aren’t my match. If you aren’t satisfied, you can have your disciples and grand-disciples bang a gong at my side tomorrow when I’m viewing the monoliths and comprehending the Dao and see if you can affect me the slightest bit. Did you really think I hadn’t prepared a pair of very comfortable, velvet earplugs?”

Chapter 219 - How Much Do You Know About The Past? (Part Two)

This set of words was very coarse and the logic behind them was rather crude as well, yet like a stone, it was rather sturdy and impossible to rebut. The Mausoleum of Books was this sort of special place. If you did not care for seniority, if you feared no man, then in this place you need not fear any man. Before the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, everyone was equal.

Ji Jin's body trembled with rage. With a trembling voice he said, "Very good, very good, and what family are you from, that you would actually dare..."

"You want to know of my origin, so that you can get people outside of the mausoleum take care of me?"

Without the slightest bit of concern on his face, Tang Thirty-Six declared, "I am the sole grandson of the Wenshui Tangs. If the Scholartree Manor is willing to offend my esteemed grandfather, then they are welcome to try."

No one was willing to offend the Wenshui Tangs, even the Divine Empress treated that lonely, upright old man with the most delicate care. At most, she would scold him as pedantic and stubborn. This was because the Tangs had a thousand years' worth of hidden reserves, because the Tangs had dreadful strategies and techniques, and most importantly, because the Tangs were rich. Very rich.

Now that Ji Jin knew Tang Thirty-Six's identity, his complexion became ashen and the sleeves of his robe trembled. He truly had no means of getting back at him. Of course, he could flaunt the rules of the Mausoleum of Books and directly discipline Tang Thirty-Six, but that would mean that he would no longer be able to stay in the mausoleum. As a Monolith Guardian, the penalties he suffered were even more severe.

Ever since he had joined the Orthodox Academy, Tang Thirty-Six had oftentimes appeared rather insolent, his mouth filled with curses. In reality, this was only the rebellious nature of young men, and also made up for the unflustered nature of Chen Changsheng. Yet how could the scion of a great family such as his be lacking in wisdom? Quit while you are ahead! Tang Thirty-Six practiced these four words more than anyone else. He walked over to the front of the monolith hut, and without pause took Chen Changsheng's hand and began to walk back down the mountain path, out of the mausoleum. As they walked back down, he mumbled, "Look at you what you've done. When you argue, you can't even out-argue someone, you're really bringing shame to our Orthodox Academy."

Gou Hanshi gave a bitter laugh as he shook his head. He paid his respects to Mister Nian Guang to take leave, then followed the pair down the mountain.

The people around the monolith hut looked at each other in dismay. The light of the oil lantern hung on the tree grew increasingly dim. It was as if the nothing had happened here.

From the mountain path, they made their way into the forests

around the mausoleum. Jumping over the canal that sided the main path, they ended up in the orange grove. The darkness made the forest rather gloomy, but tonight the stars seemed to shine extremely bright, somewhat diminishing this feeling. Chen Changsheng looked at Tang Thirty-Six's glistening belt and asked, "Why are you so bedecked with jewels and carrying the air of wealth with you tonight?"

"In Wenshui, you only tell someone they have an air of wealth about them if you want to quarrel. In the future please don't describe me with such words." Tang Thirty-Six remonstrated him, then explained, "I woke up in the middle of the night and realized that the two of you weren't there, so I came out to look for you two. I was in such a rush to leave that I randomly grabbed a belt from my bag. There was no time to figure out if it matched or not."

Chen Changsheng earnestly replied, "Luckily you didn't recklessly grab that fur skin, otherwise you might have been mistaken for a bear back at the mausoleum."

Tang Thirty-Six clicked his tongue. "So it turns out that you do know how to mock and ridicule, then back there why were you such a quai;? Or is it that you only know how to do it to your own side?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head. He truly could not continue this. He turned his thoughts to that pair of incidents, which had occurred at dawn and in the night. Perplexed, he asked "Why is it that Senior Ji Jin took such actions?"

"Before, people believed that it was the Pope His Eminence and

the other elders only wanted to use you to revive the Orthodox Academy, but after the Grand Examination, they realized that His Holiness also valued you. Those loyal to the Divine Empress naturally became nervous. The southern sects never accepted the rule of Li Palace, so they were persuaded by those people to suppress you. It's a very common occurrence."

When Tang Thirty-Six mentioned the southern sects, he shot a glance at Gou Hanshi.

Gou Hanshi smiled, but did not add anything.

Chen Changsheng thought it over, then said, "Perhaps that is the reason, but senior Ji Jin's mood was clearly unsettled."

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "Then I don't know."

"Not all Monolith Guardians can have hearts as placid as still water. Even if they managed to do so when they first entered the mausoleum, as time passes and their cultivation ceases to progress, some Monolith Guardians will inevitably begin to feel remorse. They feel constrained by their past vows and the strictures of the Mausoleum of Books. They dare not leave, but it is very easy for their minds to start developing problems."

Gou Hanshi continued, "To add on to my own opinion, perhaps Ji Jin felt that Xun Mei was extremely likely to become a Monolith Guardian, but then Xun Mei unexpectedly undertook that decisive and valorous course of action last night. In the end, his soul returned to the sea of stars, which can also be considered departing

the Mausoleum of Books. Although this really has very little to do with us, he feels that it does. Inevitably he chose to vent his frustrations on us.”

Chen Changsheng had wanted to ask, if Ji Jin did not want to stay in the mausoleum as a Monolith Guardian any longer, then he should have been happy that senior Xun Mei was able to leave the mausoleum and did not take up the role as Monolith Guardian? Why did it engender such strong resentment instead? He suddenly realized that this was one of those sorrowful questions of human nature and could not help but shake his head.

Tang Thirty-Six added, “It’s always been said that Monolith Guardians of the Mausoleum of Books have always been somewhat abnormal and unlikeable, but if you examine it more closely, these rules are abnormal in themselves.

Chen Changsheng agreed. “It’s true that they are somewhat inhumane, but I really don’t know how they thought them up.”

Gou Hanshi replied, “The Heavenly Tome Monoliths are truly too alluring for cultivators. In addition, the Monolith Guardians occupy a special position within the Mausoleum of Books. Every year, the disciples from the sects enter the mausoleum and attempt to win their support. That Mister Nian Guang has also, very clearly, been urged to act by some powerful figure within the Orthodoxy, causing him to appear to play mediator.”

Tang Thirty-Six replied, “It should be this way, but I don’t trust Nian Guang.”

Chen Changsheng recalled that Tang Thirty-Six had been extremely disrespectful to that virtuous and upstanding senior. “Why?” he asked, rather puzzled.

Tang Thirty-Six replied, “Mister Nian Guang came from the Temple Seminary. In the past, some genius from the Orthodox Academy dealt him a bitter blow. In his rage, he swore the blood oath to become a Monolith Guardian. You are the hope for the revival of the Orthodox Academy, so how can he sincerely care for your well-being?”

To Chen Changsheng, the Orthodox Academy was an old, declining, and broken-down park, a cold and cheerless set of ruins. It was simply impossible to picture this sort of historical scene.

“Was the Orthodox Academy very arrogant back then?”

Tang Thirty-Six shot another glance at Gou Hanshi before saying, “It was even more arrogant than the current Mount Li Sword Sect.”

Gou Hanshi did not reply. He did not think that the Mount Li Sect was arrogant, but he tacitly agreed with a similar interpretation.

After a moment of silence, Tang Thirty-Six added, “Though those incomparably arrogant geniuses are all dead now.”

At these words, Chen Changsheng became rather perplexed. After a moment, he thought of a matter and asked Gou Hanshi, “Does the Mausoleum of Books have any Monolith Guardians that came from Mount Li?”

“In the past there were, but then Martial Granduncle broke into the mausoleum, gave a tongue-lashing to those two seniors, then took them back to Mount Li.”

Chen Changsheng was completely taken aback. There was actually someone who so flagrantly disregarded the rules of the mausoleum, he thought to himself. Was the Martial Granduncle he mentioned Mount Li’s legendary Junior Martial Uncle?

Tang Thirty-Six’s expression did not change. Clearly he had heard this story before.

Chen Changshang curiously asked, “And those two seniors? They didn’t receive any sort of punishment?”

Gou Hanshi, replied, “Those two seniors are now elders of Mount Li’s disciplinary hall.”

Tang Thirty-Six, “Haven’t you heard the phrase, whoever’s sword is fastest, whoever’s rules are followed.”

What Chen Changsheng was even more interested in was the words the Mount Li’s Junior Martial Uncle had used to scold his two fellow sect members.

Gou Hanshi replied, “Martial Granduncle said that they couldn’t waste their limited lives on unlimited trifling matters.”

“Trifling matters?” Chen Changsheng questioned.

“Yes, Martial Granduncle always believed that cultivation was a trifling matter.”

Chen Changsheng had nothing to say to these words.

As he thought about that legendary Junior Martial Uncle more, he suddenly felt like the weight on his shoulders had become much heavier, as if a shadow had covered up the starry sky.

In the Mausoleum of Books, they lived with the Mount Li Sword Sect under one roof, but that did not mean that their enemies would suddenly become friends. Gou Hanshi’s calm and gentle manner symbolized nothing. It was more similar to Guan Feibai and Qi Jian, who both clearly resented the Orthodox Academy, and the reason for this resentment was the name Qiushan Jun, dividing the two sides and ending all hopes of reconciliation.

When they arrived at the grass hut and walked past the fence, Gou Hanshi suddenly turned to Tang Thirty-Six and said, “I am not a noble man.”

Chen Changsheng was at a loss for words as Tang Thirty-Six’s eyebrows leapt up. He spread out his hands and said, “You’re the

one that said it, not me.”

Gou Hanshi calmly and firmly continued, “[So, it is impossible for me to be a hypocrite.](#)”

TL: Basically, 君子 is a nobleman, but 伪君子 is a hypocrite. They are antonyms in Chinese

After a moment of silence, Tang Thirty-Six asked, “And then?”

Gou Hanshi smiled. “The next time you call me a hypocrite, I’m going to beat you up.”

On the next day at five in the morning, Chen Changsheng woke up on schedule. He went to the kitchen and cooked up a large pot of porridge, ate two bowls, but did not go to view the monoliths. Instead, he took up Xun Mei’s notebook and began to read it with the morning light. In his right hand he held a brush, which he used to incessantly write on a piece of paper. Yet he did not know exactly what he was writing, but at the very least they were not words.

The youths in the grass hut began to wake up, one after the other. After they ate some porridge, they set off for the mausoleum. Before Gou Hanshi took off, he made sure to greet Chen Changsheng. As Guan Feibai was leaving, he told Chen Changsheng, “Don’t think that if you make food for me every day, that I’ll become your acquaintance.” Qi Jian somewhat nervously said, “I’ll become your acquaintance, but I won’t be your friend.” Chen Changsheng chuckled and asked why. Qi Jian said it was because eldest brother would not like that. Tang Thirty-Six had woken up long ago, but he delayed until he was the last to leave.

Under Chen Changsheng's inquisitive gaze, he very solemnly said, "It's absolutely not because I'm afraid Gou Hanshi is going to beat me up."

Then to Chen Changsheng's surprise, after not much time had passed, Tang Thirty-Six returned to the grass hut, his face grim, and dragged Chen Changsheng outside.

"What's wrong?"

"Zhong Hui...is breaking into the next Realm."

The front of the monolith hut was already crowded with people, forming a dense mass. Chen Changsheng took a cursory glance and estimated that there were nearly a hundred people here. Around forty of them were this year's Grand Examination examinees, five were white-robed Monolith Guardians, and the rest were those who had entered to view monoliths in the past and never left the Mausoleum of Books. In the previous two days, those people were all at different monoliths huts individually cultivating, not interacting with the new entrants. Yet now, they all suddenly showed up in front of the Reflecting Monolith. Unexpectedly they had known that something big was about to occur.

Zhong Hui sat cross-legged in front of the monolith hut, his eyes closed, his body pervaded with mist.

Ji Jin stood expressionlessly behind him, obviously watching over him. Yet for some reason, this Scholartree Manor senior, with a profound cultivation, was very pale-faced today. It was almost as

he had consumed a great quantity of true essence.

Chen Changsheng brow creased as he faintly guessed what had occurred.

Suddenly, the gurgling sound of water arose from the front of the monolith hut.

There was no waterfall or spring here. This sound came from Zhong Hui's body.

The sounds of water grew increasingly louder, as if it was about to boil over.

During the Grand Examination, Chen Changsheng had experienced something similar in the Tower of Purging Dust. He knew that this was the prelude to breaking into the realm of Ethereal Opening.

He did not look at Zhong Hui, but at Ji Jin instead.

In one night's time, Zhong Hui had crossed the threshold into Ethereal Opening. There must be a reason, and Ji Jin's pale complexion was most likely a result of this.

At this time, Ji Jin turned to him, his eyes cold and full of contempt.

Chapter 220 - The First To Comprehend The Monolith

Viewing the monoliths of the Mausoleum of Books and comprehending the Dao. This was the fastest method for cultivators to break through into the next realm. This point had been confirmed countless years ago, so obviously none of the examinees from the Grand Examination needed to confirm it. In this tree-covered mausoleum mountain, it was very common to see monolith viewers break into the next realm. Occasionally, there would even be someone breaking through into the Star Condensation Realm, not even speaking of the Ethereal Opening Realm.

Logically, even if Zhong Hui only needed one night to break through, it still did not necessitate such a huge response, and yet besides those new entrants to the mausoleum like Su Moyu and Ye Xiaolian, those who had stayed in the mausoleum, as well as several senior Monolith attendants, all had serious expressions plastered on their faces. This was because if Zhong Hui succeeded, he would be the first amongst this new batch to break through. It was also because, regardless of any suspicious circumstances, he had only seen the first monolith of the mausoleum and obtained great benefits to his cultivation. Perhaps this was an indication that his powers of comprehension were astonishingly extraordinary.

Chen Changsheng did not lock gazes with Ji Jin for long before turning to Zhong Hui, who still sat cross-legged before the monolith hut. As he watched the mist curl around Zhong Hui's body and listened to the increasingly frantic sounds of boiling water, he thought to himself, in the end what had really

happened? Last night Zhong Hui had not even found a method to comprehend the monolith, not even thinking about the possibility of breaking through. How could it be that over the course of one night, such great change occurred?

“Apparently Zhong Hui sat in front of the monolith hut for the entire night, I also heard...that senior Ji Jin guarded him for the entire night as well.” Su Moyu walked from the edge of the woods to stand by Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six.

Chen Changsheng frowned slightly as he thought of a certain incident that had been brought up in Xun Mei’s notebook. Around twenty years ago, there was once a Monolith Guardian that originated from the Heavenly Dao Academy that had used some sort of method to help a Heavenly Dao Academy student viewing the monoliths to break into the next realm. As he looked at Ji Jin’s face, he thought to himself that maybe this person had unstintingly used an enormous amount of true essence and spirit and transferred it to Zhong Hui.

“I’m thinking the same as you, but the problem is that it’s just a bit too wasteful.” Gou Hanshi walked over. He had seen Chen Changsheng’s expression and could guess what he was thinking. “Senior Ji Jin consumed, at the very least, half of his true essence, but Zhong Hui can only maintain it for half a day. After that, the true essence will disperse from his body.”

Chen Changsheng replied. “But you can still remember the sensations. At different realms of cultivation, what the eyes see in the monolith inscriptions will naturally be different.”

Gou Hanshi nodded in agreement. “If it’s to forcefully increase comprehension speed, then this course of action would actually make some sense.”

There were some people around the monolith hut that had taken note of Chen Changsheng’s arrival. Seeing him converse with Gou Hanshi caused their expressions to subtly shift.

In the eyes of those people, the discussion taking place was far too calm and collected. There was no sense of anxiety whatsoever. There were even some people who began to grow anxious on their behalf. Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu calmly watched Chen Changsheng. Guan Feibai and the other two from Mount Li calmly watched Gou Hanshi. None of them said anything, but their meaning was crystal clear: It’s time for you two to start working harder!”

Su Moyu said, “Breaking into Ethereal Opening and then successfully comprehending the monolith. If this really is what Zhong Hui did, then you from Grass Hut Seven will unavoidably be a little embarrassed.”

Chen Changsheng was taken aback by those words. “What is this Grass Hut Seven?” he asked in confusion.

Su Moyu looked at the group of seven and explained, “Amongst this year’s examinees, you seven are the ones that have received the most attention. After all of you entered the mausoleum, all of you ended up staying in the same grass hut. Some people feel that you separated yourselves from the rest of us on purpose. Some people feel that you’re all arrogant and aloof. I don’t know who

started it, but this name has already begun circulating.”

Tang Thirty-Six proudly said, “Let them be jealous.”

Guan Feibai indifferently said, “To not cause jealousy in others is mediocrity.”

The two glanced at each other, then suddenly felt that something was not right. They turned their faces away from each other than simultaneously said, “But don’t think we’re on the same track.”

This humorous dispute did nothing to dispel the mood around the monolith hut. Those people, whose gazes rested on the group of seven, held rather complex emotions.

Chen Changsheng clearly felt that Ji Jin had used that one night’s time to allow Zhong Hui forcefully break through, so that Zhong Hui would comprehend the monolith faster than him and Gou Hanshi. The Divine Empress’ words that Tang Thirty-Six had used last night essentially had no effect. To become the first among this year’s examinees to comprehend a monolith, that was the greatest glory.

Right then, something happened in front of the monolith hut. Ji Jin lightly moved over to Zhong Hui’s, gave a shout to wake him up, then stuck a pill in his mouth. Then, his hand began to path Zhong Hui’s back.

Gou Hanshi’s expression was somewhat apprehensive.

“Scholartree Manor’s Crossing Heaven Pill?”

Chen Changsheng did not know what this ‘Crossing Heaven Pill’ was, but the vast majority of the people in front of the monolith hut did. Hearing Gou Hanshi’s words, their faces could not help but change color. To think that Scholartree Manor would use such a precious medicine to help Zhong Hui break through. It was easy to see how much Scholartree Manor valued this youthful scholar, and it was also because of Ji Jin’s intense desire to see Chen Changsheng and the others thwarted.

Zhong Hui swallowed the pill, then used the true essence that he had obtained from Ji Jin to digest the pill. In a flash, his face took on a deep red complexion, then after a moment returned to normal. The mist that pervaded his body grew much darker. Then, like smoke returning to the mountaintop, it slowly made its way back into his body.

An extremely pure breath of Qi appeared around the monolith hut.

The oil lantern that was hung up on the tree had long since gone out, but now it suddenly began to sway back and forth. A cool breeze was blowing from some unknown place, and the flowers and plants around the Reflecting Monolith swayed with the wind.

Zhong Hui opened his eyes and stood up. He slowly turned around and looked at the crowd around him. His gaze seemed much more serene, much more profound than usual.

A Scholartree Manor student happily shouted, “Congratulations to senior for breaking through!”

Those monolith viewers that had stayed in the mausoleum voiced their agreement. One of them said, “Scholartree Manor’s hidden reserves are truly profound. Excellent, excellent!”

Zhong Hui was very tranquil. His handsome face bore not a hint of ecstasy and not a trace of arrogance. He clasped his hands in salutation to the crowd, his manner and behavior both unhurried.

One of the old timers praised, “Although he had outside help, in the end he still entered a new realm. To break through into a new realm after viewing only the first monolith is by no means an easy feat.”

“Many thanks to Martial Uncle for his assistance.” Zhong Hui turned to Ji Jin, clasped his hands, and bowed down to the ground, his voice filled with sincerity.

Ji Jin’s pale face showed a hint of red. He lightly stroked his hair and said nothing, extremely satisfied.

It was just as the crowd had said, if Zhong Hui did not have such excellent innate perception, then even if he had used up all the true essence, he would have been incapable of producing this scene.

The area around the monolith hut suddenly grew quiet.

Because Zhong Hui had begun walking towards the mountain path where Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi were standing.

Of the three people in the First Banner of this year's Grand Examination, Chen Changsheng was first, Gou Hanshi was second, and Zhong Hui had placed third. When this result had come out, those who knew the details of the battle felt sorry for Gou Hanshi, and even more were surprised at how inconceivable Chen Changsheng's growth in power was, but very few people thought about Zhong Hui. Even if they brought him up, it was usually with a hint of ridicule, saying that he really was extremely lucky.

Zhong Hui's luck in the Grand Examination really had been too good. In the drawing of lots for battle, besides his final loss to Luo Luo, he had actually not faced any strong opponents. Guan Feibai, Liang Banhu, Qi Jian, Zhuang Huanyu; he had faced none of these opponents, who were not any weaker than him, and if he had matched up against the obviously stronger Zhexiu, he would most likely have lost. Perhaps he would have been defeated by Gou Hanshi or Chen Changsheng. It was luck that he had not encountered any of these opponents, or else it would have been very difficult for him to enter the top three.

Of course, no one would have placed him on the same level as Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng. The most important reason was because he was not at the same realm of cultivation. Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi were both at the Ethereal Opening realm, while he had been at Meditation. Even if he was only one step away from Ethereal Opening, he was still missing the most important thing, the immense gap of that step, so it was a matter, of course, that he was ignored.

But today, he had finally entered into Ethereal Opening.

Of the First Banner of the Grand Examination's top three, at the very least they were now equal in terms of cultivation.

When those people around the monolith hut saw him walk towards Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi, they knew he would have something to say.

“After the Grand Examination, the Pavilion of Divination will make no changes to the Proclamations of Azure Sky and Golden Distinction. This is due to the fact that the Three Banners of the Grand Examination will all enter the Mausoleum of Books. Within this mountain mausoleum, there are countless chances for good fortune and countless setbacks. There were many examinees in the Grand Examination who would have performed poorly, but once they entered the mausoleum, they would soar like a dragon into the azure sky. There were also examinees who would have had a good showing in the Grand Examination, but once they entered the mausoleum they could do nothing but sit in front of the huts, moaning and groaning before the monoliths, using up the entire day with nothing to show for it. In the face of all of this, the previous rankings were meaningless. Everything depended on this moment, so the Pavilion of Divination would wait until the examinees had left the mausoleum before adjusting the rankings.”

Zhong Hui looked at Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi as he spoke. “Before I entered the mausoleum, everyone said that I was on par with the two of you. Luckily, I finally found my good fortune. Last night you told me, what does your ability to

comprehend the monoliths have to do with me, that we were not familiar with each, so why would I be disappointed. What I want to say to you is this. If you can no longer keep up with me, then once we leave the mausoleum, perhaps you won't even have the qualifications to be my opponent, then I will truly be disappointed.”

Chen Changsheng gave no response while Gou Hanshi was as calm as ever.

Tang Thirty-Six coldly mocked, “Isn’t it just breaking into Ethereal Opening? Those two reached Ethereal Opening long ago. With such arrogance, a passersby might think that you had broken into Star Condensation.”

These words were actually very reasonable. Even if Zhong Hui had broken into Ethereal Opening, it could only be finally considered catching up to Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng, not worthy of speaking such words.

Zhong Hui paid no attention to Tang Thirty-Six. At the very end, he glanced at Chen Changsheng and said, “That’s all I have to say. I will be taking a step ahead of you.”

Upon hearing this, the two scholars from Scholartree Manor vaguely guessed at something and became extremely excited. They loudly shouted, “Respectfully sending off senior!”

Ji Jin was still running his hands through his hair. Though he said nothing, the smile on his face continued to grow.

Even those several monolith guardians surrounding crowd nodded their heads, as if in praise.

Saying these words, Zhong Hui walked back to the monolith hut, stopping in front of the monolith. He rested his right hand on the lines on the surface of the monolith.

A bright light appeared. A gust of wind swept through, causing the leaves on the tree branches to rustle.

Zhong Hui's body vanished.

Seeing what had just happened, the new entrants to the mausoleum could not help but cry out in surprise.

However, those who had already been in the mausoleum for some time turned a blind eye towards this event.

Yes, the Heavenly Tome Monolith had been comprehended.

Among this year's examinees from the Grand Examination who had entered the mausoleum, the first person to successfully comprehend the monolith had appeared.

It was not Gou Hanshi, nor was it Chen Changsheng. It was Scholartree Manor's Zhong Hui.

Right now he was probably standing before the second monolith hut.

The cool breeze gradually calmed down. The area in front of the Reflecting Monolith also gradually calmed down and peace returned to the monolith hut.

Everyone subconsciously looked towards Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng. Particularly the gazes towards Chen Changsheng contained a variety of emotions.

It was just as Tang Thirty-Six and Guan Feibai had said. Many people were jealous of the so-called Grass Hut Seven. Of course the target of most of their jealousy was him, who had been barely known, who had suddenly risen to prominence in the Grand Examination, who was potentially going to marry Xu Yourong: Chen Changsheng. Seeing him, who would not secretly hold some resentment in their heart?

These people who had previously directed their jealousy and acrimony towards him, in their gazes now had a sense of understanding, filled with deliberate sympathy and pity.

Chapter 221 - The Gate Of Myriad Wonders

After Zhong Hui had successfully comprehended the monolith, he disappeared without a trace. He had left the words “I’ll take a step ahead of you” to Chen Changsheng, who was still standing on the mountain path. In the eyes of the crowd, Chen Changsheng’s figure seemed rather lonely, although he himself did not feel this way. They looked at him and thought with a small amount of derision that the monoliths of the Mausoleum of Books truly were impartial. No one could be lucky forever.

Some felt that this was not enough and sought to rub salt over Chen Changsheng’s wounds. One of the Scholartree Manor scholars in front of the monolith hut derisively said to him, “The words senior left with you before he departed were said rather indifferently, but to me, they were too modest. Although it’s only a step, once he has finished taking this step, then perhaps the difference will be more than a thousand li.”

These words were meant to mock Chen Changsheng, but it ended up including Gou Hanshi as well. Guan Feibai’s eyebrows leapt up and he was about flare up when, unexpectedly, Tang Thirty-Six beat him to it. He teased the Scholartree Manor scholar, “Didn’t he say he was going a step ahead? Where is he preparing to go? Reincarnation? So impatient.”

That Scholartree Manor was infuriated by his words. Ji Jin’s face also suddenly turned dark. His fingers became rigid and he almost pulled a hair out of his beard.

Mister Nian Guang and the rest of the Monolith Guardians

walked over. Nian Guang warned Tang Thirty-Six, “Cease your unruly manners. If this happens again, no one will be able to protect you.”

Tang Thirty-Six looked back at him and scornfully said, “As I said last night, even if you wanted to hit me, you can’t hit me. What can you do with me?”

Mister Nian Guang solemnly said, “We Monolith Guardians are entrusted with keeping order amongst those who view the monoliths. If you continue to make trouble, I will personally write to my school, to have them recommend to the Orthodoxy that you be expelled from the mausoleum immediately.”

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him as if he were an idiot. Pointing to Chen Changsheng by his side, he said, “Truly this is an old man that’s gone muddleheaded from viewing the monoliths for too long. Do you know who he is? At the imperial palace, before countless witnesses, His Holiness the Pope personally involved himself! Countless people in the capital suspect that he’s His Holiness the Bishop’s illegitimate son! Recommend who to the Orthodoxy? If the Li Palace will listen to you, I will cut off my own head and offer it to you.”

Mister Nian Guang became indignant and shouted back, “If the Li Palace really does protect him, I will definitely get my school to ask for the reason!”

Tang Thirty-Six was also indignant and yelled back, “Your school? You should go ask those bishops and the Temple Seminary, who gives a third of their money every year so that you lot can idle

around until you die for so many years! You're all dependent on my family's support! The Orthodoxy won't comply because they protect Chen Changsheng, the Temple Seminary won't comply because of the benefits they receive from protecting me, so you have to get some southerner to come out and scare me! What sort of reasoning do you have!"

Mister Nian Guang trembled in rage, now prepared to discipline him with a few more words, but in the end he angrily brushed his sleeves and left.

Silence reigned around the monolith hut. Regardless of if it was the new entrants to the mausoleum, or the old entrants, they all stared blankly at Tang Thirty-Six. "What sort of person is he, really?" they thought to themselves.

Because Zhong Hui had taken the lead in comprehending the monoliths, Tang Thirty-Six's mood was extremely bad. He yelled at the spectators, "What are you looking at?! Have you never seen a wealthy person before?"

"Are the Wenshui Tangs...really that wealthy?"

Guan Feibai, Liang Banhu, and Qi Jian looked at each other speechlessly. They had grown up in bitter conditions, and life at the Mount Li Sword Sect was even more Spartan. Even Qi Jian, who had experienced the dotage that only the sect master's last disciple had, and who since childhood had been raised in the Discipline Hall, had not lived any sort of luxurious lifestyle. It was hard for them to imagine that the world really had this sort of wealthy person. In the aspect of money, the youths of the Mount Li

Sword Sect were truly lacking in knowledge.

“If you think about it, if Tang Tang is so wealthy, yet he’s always so swollen with arrogance, why is it that he isn’t that unlikable?”

Guan Feibai thought back to that time in the Li Palace, where those girls from the Thirteenth Division of Radiant Green and the Holy Maiden Peak looked at Tang Thirty-Six with such fervor. He had thought of a probable reason, but he found it awkward to say in front of his junior.

At this time, a youth began walking towards them. Guan Feibai and the other two clasped their hands in greeting, and smiles appeared on their faces. It was very obvious that they were very familiar with this person. Especially Liang Banhu. Normally, he was rather wooden and oppressive, but now he had even stepped forward to welcome this youth. He even patted the youth on the shoulder several times, making it seem like they were quite close.

Gou Hanshi introduced the youth to Chen Changsheng. “This is my third martial brother, Liang Xiaoxiao.”

Chen Changsheng realized that this was the Third Law of the Divine State’s Seven Laws, Liang Xiaoxiao. Liang Xiaoxiao had always been ranked third on the Proclamation of Azure Sky. It was only during this year’s rearranging of ranks that he was bumped down to fourth by Luo Luo. Chen Changsheng also knew his name because he was the previous year’s first rank of the First Banner of the Grand Examination. Previously, when all those people were standing in the crowd, nobody took note of his presence. Ji Jin and Zhong Hui’s words from last night were reasonable. The

Mausoleum of Books truly was a place where heroes gathered. To be first rank of the First Banner in the Grand Examination really was not anything special here.

Liang Xiaoxiao clasped his hands in greeting towards Chen Changsheng, his expression indifferent. Apparently, he was not one for much talking.

He then turned to Gou Hanshi and said, “Senior, these past two days, I fixated on the East Pavilion Monolith, so I did not have the time to find all of you.”

Gou Hanshi responded, “Of course viewing the monoliths and cultivating is more important. Since we’ve already come to the mausoleum, there will be plenty of opportunities to meet each other.”

Chen Changsheng recalled that yesterday, Gou Hanshi said that he would introduce him to somebody. Now that he thought about it, Gou Hanshi probably meant this youth.

Once Qi Jian heard the three words “East Pavilion Monolith”, he said with amazement, “East Pavilion Monolith... that’s the sixth monolith. You’re really amazing third brother.”

Liang Xiaoxiao gave a subtle nod. Although his name contained the word ‘Xiao’(笑), he did not show the slightest hint of a smile on his face. He was actually a bit more icily arrogant than Guan Feibai. (TN: Liang Xiaoxiao is written as 梁笑晓. 笑 means laughter or smile.)

Gou Hanshi smiled. “Since you’ve already seen the East Pavilion Monolith, then presumably breaking through to the next realm is not close at hand.”

Liang Xiaoxiao solemnly said, “Half a year ago, I broke through into Ethereal Opening realm, and have not been able to take a single step forward since. I am deeply ashamed, so I didn’t send any messages home.”

Liang Banhu gave a good-natured laugh. “It’s fine, it’s fine.”

Gou Hanshi told Chen Changsheng, “Third brother and fifth brother are siblings by blood.”

Tang Thirty-Six’s gaze moved back and forth between Liang Xiaoxiao and Liang Banhu’s faces, then asked in confusion, “Why is it that the fifth sibling looks older than the third sibling?”

Upon hearing this, Liang Xiaoxiao turned his head and gave Tang Thirty-Six a cold stare.

Tang Thirty-Six stared back.

Qi Jian suggested, “Third brother, he’s just that sort of person, no need to worry about him.”

Liang Xiaoxiao took this advice to heart, and turned away from

Tang Thirty-Six.

Zhexiu glanced at Qi Jian, his gaze somewhat odd.

Qi Jian sensed his gaze, then as if he were stung by a scorpion, he quickly retreated behind Liang Banhu.

As Gou Hanshi explained to Chen Changsheng, originally the Fifth Law, Liang Banhu, was the elder brother, and the higher ranked, Liang Xiaoxiao, was the family's younger brother. Then Chen Changsheng recalled that Liang Xiaoxiao had said that half a year ago he had broken through, so he understood that this person was already at the Ethereal Opening. In other words, the moment he left the mausoleum, would he leave the Proclamation of Azure Sky and enter the Proclamation of Golden Distinction?

“I would have to trouble you with telling Her Highness Luo Luo, I will not be fourth place on the Proclamation of Azure Sky.”

Liang Xiaoxiao apathetically delivered these words to Chen Changsheng. He did not wait for a response, nor did he wait for Tang Thirty-Six to open his mouth. He turned to Gou Hanshi and seriously said, “Senior, although we came from the South with Scholartree Manor together, being in Mount Li is still Mount Li. How can we fall behind?”

Gou Hanshi replied, “I have my own way of keeping score. You continue to meditate on the monoliths. There's only one month's time left before we have to leave. Time is of the essence.”

Liang Xiaoxiao said nothing more.

It was just as he said. Although that ranking in front of the Mausoleum of Books had long been destroyed by Zhou Tong on the order of the Divine Empress, in matters of competition and even glory, there was no way to forcefully wipe it from the hearts of the people. The speed at which one comprehended the monoliths and the total number of monoliths comprehended, within the hearts of the people, there still remained a formless ranking.

This year, there was no unparalleled genius that had comprehended a monolith on the first day, nor was there one that succeeded on the second day, but on the third day, Zhong Hui had successfully comprehended a monolith. This could already be considered as not bad, but those old entrants, who already knew who Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi were, already knew that they were the top two from this year's Grand Examination. In addition to this, rumors from outside had already trickled in, that these two were reputed for their profound knowledge of the Daoist Canon. Naturally, the two youths attracted quite a bit of attention. And yet, up to this point, neither of the two had managed to comprehend the first Heavenly Tome Monolith. Inevitably, this would stir up some discussion.

“After Wang Zhice, the people who are most praised for their erudition in the Daoist Canon are these two people. But who would think that they would be beaten by that scholar from Scholartree Manor.”

“Not all rumors are true. What well-read in the Daoist Canon? It's more like at a young age they broke into Ethereal Opening.

From what I see, some facts were likely over exaggerated.”

The monolith viewers all went back to their respective monoliths to achieve enlightenment. Liang Xiaoxiao also took his leave. The crowd in front of the Reflecting Monolith gradually dispersed, and the mountain forest regained its tranquility. Chen Changsheng walked up to the front of the monolith hut and stared at the black monolith. After a long period of silence, he suddenly asked, “How did he disappear? Don’t tell me that the back of the monolith contains a miniature world?”

Tang Thirty-Six and the others thought he was ruminating over some important matter, not pondering this sort of question. They could not help but be struck speechless.

Gou Hanshi said, “It is said the Heavenly Tome Monoliths are pieces of some miniature world that have now scattered all over the true world. Although the space that they were once a part of is now destroyed, these pieces are still somehow interlinked. It can also be understood like so: each monolith is a sliding door, but these sliding doors don’t lead to anywhere except other sliding doors, which are the other Heavenly Tome Monoliths. In addition, the sequence of monoliths is eternal and unchanging.”

Chen Changsheng replied, “So it was like that. No wonder it’s said that the Mausoleum of Books only has one path, but, how do the Heavenly Tome Monoliths decide whether the key in the hands of the monolith viewer is the right one?”

The Daoist Canon did not record how one moved from one Heavenly Tome Monolith to another. As for those previous great

experts that had recorded their time in the Mausoleum of Books, they had also not mentioned such details. This was because in the view of cultivators, this sort of thing was common knowledge and there was no need to explain it.

Chen Changsheng knew many bits of esoterica from the three thousand classics of the Daoist Canon, but he was somewhat lacking in knowledge of the world or cultivation. This was because he was a self-made genius.

Gou Hanshi answered, “The Heavenly Tomes cannot comprehend. In many ways, the Heavenly Tome Monoliths themselves are mystical and maybe even incomprehensible. Whether one’s interpretation of the monolith inscriptions is correct or not, this is something that the cultivator can never decide, nor can a spectator. Only the Heavenly Tome Monolith itself has the right to decide.”

“Decides by itself?” Chen Changsheng did not understand so he repeated the words.

Gou Hanshi explained, “The monolith viewer touches the monolith. If the Heavenly Tome Monolith feels that you understand, then you have really understood it.”

Chen Changsheng thought of that famous description of the Heavenly Dao in the Daoist Canon: Mystery of mysteries, the gate of myriad wonders.

If the Heavenly Tome Monolith was a door, what sort of

wondrous world would be behind it?

Seeing him with such a pensive expression before the monolith, Tang Thirty-Six and the others decided to stay silent.

Zhong Hui had already deciphered the first Heavenly Tome Monolith. Was Chen Changsheng now interested, or was he content on continuing to sit on the sidelines. Could it be that he was still in no rush?

“Ah!” Chen Changsheng suddenly thought of something and said, “I have to go back.”

Tang Thirty-Six asked in surprise, “What is it?”

Somewhat anxious, Chen Changsheng replied, “You dragged me out in such a rush that I forgot that I was still boiling water on the stove. What will we do if it boils dry?”

Chapter 222 - The Teenager Who Embraced The Monolith

Seeing Chen Changsheng's figure hurry down the mountain, Tang Thirty-Six had a sort of indescribable feeling. Zhexiu felt the same way, and on his normally expressionless face a hint of doubt could be seen. He silently thought to himself, could it be that Chen Changsheng was running away from something? But when he thought about all the storms that had brewed over the Orthodox Academy during this past year, no matter what he thought about, he could not imagine Chen Changsheng as that sort of person.

Gou Hanshi looked away from the mountain path, no longer concerning himself with Chen Changsheng's plans. He spoke to his fellow disciples, "Last night, I only let you see a section of Senior Xun Mei's notebook because I didn't want all of you to be distracted. After you saw the notebook, all of you should have known that there are many angles through which one can comprehend the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. Then, what do you all think about all this?"

Guan Feibai thought it over before saying, "In Senior Xun Mei's notebook, only for the Reflecting Monolith did he leave behind more than a dozen trains of thought. After looking over each one carefully, I have come to the conclusion that, in reality, they are all extremely reasonable. It's just that my Mount Li Sword Sect is located in the south, so I'm used to taking the idea to stimulate the spiritual sense. With a bit more time, I will probably be able to comprehend this monolith."

Qi Jian and Liang Banhu had the same opinion, but Gou Hanshi

said, "If you can forget every one of those trains of thought, or so to say experiences, in Senior Xun Mei's notebook, then maybe you'll be able to comprehend the monolith."

Once he finished speaking, he very naturally thought back to the conversation he had with Chen Changsheng last night. To him, Chen Changsheng had very clearly separated those concepts, otherwise he would not have chosen to search for the true meaning within the changes and attempt to open up a new idea. It was just that this sort of method for comprehending the monoliths was almost too new. To open a new path was really not an easy affair.

Guan Feibai and the others were somewhat shocked at his words, but after calming down and contemplating for a moment, they vaguely understood their senior's meaning. They walked before the monolith hut and each found a place that was relatively flat to sit down. Then they stared at the black monolith and began to silently pour out all the words in Xun Mei's notebooks onto the monolith, gradually expelling them from their minds. Zhexiu and Tang Thirty-Six glanced at each other, before also walking forward. Many of the students from the Grand Examination's Three Banners, who had entered the mausoleum this year, also sat cross-legged in front of the monolith hut. Only Gou Hanshi remained standing in the distance, calmly and silently gazing at the distant mountains, his thoughts an enigma.

Time slowly passed, but the space in front of the monolith remained silent and soundless. At some point, someone removed the oil lantern from the tree. The newly lightened tree branch swayed lightly in the spring wind. From time to time, it would spring up a few inches towards the blue sky. Occasionally it would shed a leaf, which would flutter in the wind to land in front of the

hut.

Qi Jian suddenly opened his eyes, brushed off the leaf that had landed on his slim shoulder, then stood up. After a moment's hesitation, he walked over to the monolith hut.

As members of the group that lived in Xun Mei's grass hut, they were the object of attention for all the students viewing the monoliths; otherwise, how would the name Grass Hut Seven have come about? In that quiet period of time, who knew how many gazes had, from time to time, glanced at those seven. Seeing that Qi Jian was seemingly moving to comprehend the monolith, the previously tranquil surroundings could not help but begin to buzz with activity again.

Zhong Hui was the first to comprehend the monolith, so many people wanted to know, who would be the second? The vast majority of people felt that the second person would be Gou Hanshi, because Chen Changsheng was not present. If not for him, then the next most likely person to succeed would likely be Zhexiu, or perhaps Guan Feibai or Liang Banhu, who had both cultivated for a relatively longer amount of time. No one thought it would actually be the still-young Qi Jian.

Qi Jian walked up to the Reflecting Monolith before glancing behind him, his young and tender face was filled with uncertainty.

Gou Hanshi stood under a distant pine tree. He said nothing, but a smile appeared on his face. This caused Qi Jian to also smile and the expression of uncertainty disappeared without a trace, leaving behind only happiness.

He took another step towards the Reflecting Monolith, before carefully placing his right hand on the edge of the monolith. He did not touch a single line on the surface of the monolith.

A cool breeze swept up from the cliff behind the monolith, brushing against Qi Jian which caused his hair to float lightly in the breeze. It flitted across his young and elegant face, and then he vanished.

The monolith hut grew deathly silent. The lively discussion that had just been taking place had vanished without a trace, just like Qi Jian's petite form. Just like that, the second person to comprehend the Reflecting Monolith had appeared.

Before the onlookers had even awoken from their shock, Guan Feibai suddenly stood up and began to walk towards the monolith hut.

Compared to Qi Jian, this cold and arrogant Fourth Law of the Divine State was truly casual, even if what he faced was this hallowed Heavenly Tome Monolith.

He placed his right hand on the Reflecting Monolith, not even caring to glance at where it fell. It was as if he was randomly patting a railing, ready to discuss the day's weather.

The cool breeze rose up again, and with another flash of bright light, his figure also disappeared.

All those people, who were still bitterly attempting to comprehend the true meaning of the monolith, were incomparably shocked by this development. They felt even more helpless as Liang Banhu also stood up and walked to the monolith hut. This peasant child, who kept the lowest profile and was the most taciturn of the Divine State's Seven Laws, carefully tidied his clothes, clasped his hands in respect, and then very seriously placed his hand on the monolith's surface.

Without a break, without an interval, these three Mount Li Sword Sect disciples, one after the other, comprehended the Reflecting Monolith and departed for the second Heavenly Tome Monolith.

After a moment of silence, several sighs arose from the front of the monolith hut. These sighs were full of admiration, and also disappointment.

Their talent in cultivating the Dao indeed was not the same.

The Mount Li Sword Sect indeed was exceptional.

Compared to Zhong Hui's breakthrough that morning, the success of these three Mount Li Sword Sect Disciples did not cause much of a stir. Yet they also did not have a senior from their school protecting them, nor had they broken through into Ethereal Opening. They had just very ordinarily stood up, walked up to the hut, then before everyone's eyes, disappeared. This was truly to act as freely as one wished.

Of the four disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect that had entered the mausoleum, only Gou Hanshi remained. Many people subconsciously looked towards him and thought it quite strange. His level of cultivation and knowledge was far and above these three juniors. How could it be that his comprehension speed was slower? Some of them guessed at a reason, and when they saw Gou Hanshi finally leave the shade of the pine tree and walk towards the monolith, they felt that they guessed correctly.

Gou Hanshi walked in front of the Reflecting Monolith, yet he did not close his eyes in thought, nor did he examine those lines on the monolith. Gazing, as always, at the distant mountain, he placed his right hand on the monolith.

The cool breeze blew again. The birds in forest took flight, and with the fluttering of their wings, his figure had already ceased to be.

At this point, everyone there finally understood that Gou Hanshi had long ago comprehended the Reflecting Monolith. He had only been waiting for his three juniors to comprehend it too.

In other words, did it not mean that as long as he wanted to, he could have very easily become the first this year to comprehend a monolith? They thought back to how, in the early morning after Zhong Hui had successfully comprehended the monolith, when those two Scholartree Manor students were so excited and proud, and they could not help but feel that it was now somewhat embarrassing. At this time, those two young Scholartree Manor scholars that still remained in front of the monolith truly did seem

rather embarrassed.

The reason Gou Hanshi could comprehend the monolith but choose not to move on was because he was waiting for his fellow disciples. Then what about Chen Changsheng? Very naturally, they were drawn to this question. Was he like Gou Hanshi and had deciphered this Heavenly Tome Monolith long ago? If that were true, then who was he waiting for? Or was it as Zhong Hui had said, that he had insufficient skill to comprehend the monoliths?

Discussion gradually stirred, then gradually died down once more.

After not much time had passed, Zhuang Huanyu walked up to the monolith hut. As this year's strongest student from the Heavenly Dao Academy, many people recognized him. It was just that for some reason, after he entered the Mausoleum of Books, he had disappeared. No one knew where he had gone, or what he had been doing. Even in the early morning when Zhong Hui was breaking through, he was nowhere to be seen. They could not help but feel surprised.

Zhuang Huanyu's shirt was covered with grass and leaves, as if he had actually spent two nights out in the woods. He cut a somewhat sorry figure, but his expression was extremely calm and there was a sense of self-confidence about his appearance.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and asked, "You didn't go to the Green Forest Dorm?"

The Six Ivies had always been in the capital, thus they were extremely close to the Mausoleum of Books and could obtain many conveniences. In the past few years, the Heavenly Dao Academy had been the most well-off of all the academies in the Zhou Dynasty, so naturally they would have made previous arrangements for their students in the mausoleum. The Green Forest Dorm was the dormitory for the Heavenly Dao Academy's students within the mausoleum. The other academies, like the Temple Seminary and Star Seizer Academy, also had similar arrangements.

“I didn't go to the Green Forest Dorm, because I had no time.”

Zhuang Huanyu brushed the dirt and leaves off of his body, before walking inside the monolith hut.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at his back and said, “Even if you succeed now, you can only be placed sixth. Is it really worth all the trouble?”

Zhuang Huanyu held his right hand in front of the monolith and said, “But at the very least, I'm still in front of Chen Changsheng, right?”

Saying this, he rested his right hand on the monolith.

Not long after, Su Moyu stood up and walked to the monolith hut, becoming the seventh person this year to succeed at comprehending the monoliths.

Seeing one person after another succeed, how could such a proud person as Tang Thirty-Six not feel nervous? Especially since Su Moyu had placed behind him in the Proclamation of Azure Sky, he became even more pressured.

After a moment, he sobered up, slightly frowned, then closed his eyes, no longer thinking about these matters. He sent his consciousness out of his body, not dwelling on the monolith. At some moments it even seemed like he had actually fallen asleep.

When he woke up, it was already twilight. The glow of the sunset suffused the sky and the mausoleum's vibrant forest seemed to burn in the light.

He stood up and began to walk towards the monolith hut. As he passed Zhexiu, he said "Tell Chen Changsheng that he can start eating without me."

He walked up to the monolith and happily laughed. He spread his arms wide then gave that ice-cold monolith a giant embrace.

To comprehend the Heavenly Tome Monoliths would give off a sort of indescribable feeling. To cultivators, this feeling was more delicious than dragon marrow, more fascinating than the stars. There was a sense of immense satisfaction, the so-called only after [eating the marrow does one know the taste](#). The vast majority of cultivators, after comprehending the first monolith and arriving at the second, would lose themselves in the monoliths and forget the passage of time.

(TL Note: 食髓知味 is an idiom that translates to "Eating the

marrow to know the taste”. It means that once one eats the bone marrow, it tastes so good that they want to immediately eat it again.)

Tang Thirty-Six knew that he was powerless to resist such intoxication. He knew that he would spend the night in the company of the stars embracing the second monolith until he fell asleep, thus he told Zhexiu to bring a message back to Chen Changsheng to eat without him. Just like him, Zhong Hui, Zhuang Huanyu, Qi Jian, and the rest were all sitting in front of the second monolith, not knowing how to even write the two words “go back”.

However, the world always would have people that stood out from the masses. The exceptionally gifted and strong-willed would never be confused by external forces.

Accompanied by the sunset, Gou Hanshi returned to the grass hut.

Smelling the fragrance of egg soup emanating from the kitchen and seeing Chen Changsheng sitting at the doorstep staring blankly at the setting sun, he asked, “Just what are you waiting for?”

Chapter 223 - The Cry Of The Goose (Part One)

Chen Changsheng rubbed his eyes, that ached from staring at the sunset, before standing up from the doorstep. He said, “I’m not waiting for anything.”

Gou Hanshi replied, “Even if you want to walk an untrodden path, using your own words, that method is a little stupid, but you also said that the method was feasible. Logically, it’s impossible for you to not have a method to comprehend the first Heavenly Tome Monolith, because I know your powers of comprehension are far greater than anyone else can imagine.”

As the world’s two most erudite scholars of the Daoist Canon, he and Chen Changsheng were rivals. From the Ivy Festival to the Grand Examination, they had vied with each other for supremacy, but it was because they were rivals that they truly understood each other. He had seen Chen Changsheng rise in the span of a few months from an ordinary youth that could not cultivate at all to someone who broke into Ethereal Opening amidst the rain in the Education Palace. If he did not have such excellent powers of comprehension, how could he have done such a thing?

Chen Changsheng thought for a few moments, then said, “I think the method I discussed with you last night was wrong.”

Gou Hanshi arched his brows and asked, “In what ways was it wrong?”

“It’s not a matter of it being wrong. If I could use that to follow the idea of studying the changes in the monolith inscriptions, I would probably be able to comprehend the monoliths, but I’ve always felt it to be somewhat strange, as if there was something missing. If I can’t figure out what it is that I’m missing and continue to study this method, I will find it very difficult to convince myself, because the Dao I cultivate is to follow my heart.”

Gou Hanshi asked, “Don’t tell me you’re planning on creating a new method?”

“There’s also that train of thought, but I haven’t resolved myself to it yet.”

Gou Hanshi frowned. To change methods halfway through was something best avoided when viewing the monoliths. “You know that this is a very dangerous way of thinking.”

Chen Changsheng understood his warning. If he continued to hesitate in this manner, his hope of deciphering the Heavenly Tome Monoliths would grow smaller and smaller.

He pondered the matter for a long time before finally saying, “If I can’t comprehend them in the end, then forget about it.”

“Regardless of how you think, you shouldn’t be too pedantic about it.” Gou Hanshi said these words and walked into the hut.

Chen Changsheng looked at Gou Hanshi’s back and said, “The

egg soup still needs a bit more time. Don't be in such a rush to take off the lid just yet."

These words had no hidden meaning, yet Gou Hanshi saw one in it. He thought to himself that Chen Changsheng must have a reason for waiting.

After a while, Zhexiu returned to the grass hut. Of the seven people that resided there, only he and Chen Changsheng had not succeeded at comprehending the monolith. Seeing how the courtyard was now much more cold and cheerless than it had been the night before, his face began to show traces of self-rejection. Turning to Chen Changsheng, he asked, "Why is it that I'm never able to make it work? Could it be that my innate talent is not enough?"

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, this wolf youth who had no sect or school and cultivated all on his own, could live in those cruel, snowy plains. His name could strike fear in the hearts of many famous demons, and he could comfortably beat Guan Feibai and other such youths on the Proclamation of Azure Sky; not only did his innate bloodline talent have no problems, it was also unreasonably strong.

"It has nothing to do with your innate talent."

"Then what's wrong? My diligence or concentration?"

"It has nothing to do with any of those, it's just because..." Chen Changsheng earnestly told him, "You've read too little."

Zhexiu got a little angry. Since he was a child, he had roamed the snowy plains, homeless and miserable. Where would he have found the time to read books?

Chen Changsheng took Xun Mei's notebook from his chest and handed it to Zhexiu. "It's fine to not read much, but the most troubling part is that from my observations of you, I've realized you really don't like to read. Of the notebook senior left behind, you only looked at it twice. Last night, you only looked at it for a while before going to sleep. How is that okay?"

Zhexiu's face paled, but it wasn't because he was injured, but rather because he was angry. Taking the notebook, he went straight into the grass hut.

The next day at five in the morning, Chen Changsheng opened his eyes and took five breaths' of time to settle his mind. Afterwards, he got up from his bed and realized that Tang Thirty-Six was sprawled out sleeping on the side, snoring thunderously. Walking to the outer room, he saw that Qi Jian and the others were all in a deep sleep. He realized that at some late hour last night, they had returned from the Mausoleum of Books.

After washing his face and rinsing his mouth, just like the previous two days, he began to boil water and prepare breakfast. Next, he began to sweep the courtyard and repair the toppled fence. Even after Tang Thirty-Six and the others had finished eating breakfast and left to view the monoliths, he still did not seem like he wanted to leave. His face contained no trace of apprehension, and he even seemed to be enjoying the present

lifestyle.

The people had gone and the courtyard was empty. He sat back down at the doorstep, opened Xun Mei's notebook, and began to read once more. He gradually became enthralled and he gained more and more.

For the entire day, besides making meals and cleaning, he did not leave the doorstep. Obviously he did not go to see the Reflecting Monolith either.

As night fell, Tang Thirty-Six and the rest returned one after the other. After dinner, they sat around the table and discussed the inscriptions on the second monolith. The atmosphere was extremely warm and enthusiastic.

Chen Changsheng called Zhexiu into the inner room, took out his copper needles, and began to treat his illness. Right now, he was still confirming the nature of the abnormality within Zhexiu's meridians. To cure Zhexiu of this condition, that had tormented him for a dozen years, was not something that could be done in a day.

After a long time, the group around the table realized that the two were still missing. Qi Jian was looking at the tightly-closed door of the inner room; his small, young, and honest face held an unbearable expression. Gou Hanshi frowned and shook his head. Right now even he was starting to find it strange.

Not wanting to upset the two in the inner room, the group

decided to end their discussion.

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly stood up, opened the door, and told Chen Changsheng, “Today, another three people succeeded.”

Chen Changsheng was concentrating on maneuvering the copper needles with his fingers. He softly said something to Zhexiu, but paid Tang Thirty-Six no attention.

Day after day passed. The number of days after this year’s Grand Examination examinees had entered the mausoleum was now seven.

On the fifth day, Zhexiu finally passed through the Reflecting Monolith. It was unknown whether or not it was because he had spent the last few night studying that book.

Chen Changsheng had still not succeeded in comprehending a monolith. Now, he had established a new record.

Previously, he had established a incomparably glorious and brilliant record in the world of cultivation: the youngest cultivator to enter Ethereal Opening.

The record he had established now was less than brilliant.

Amongst all the previous holders of the first place of the First Banner of the Grand Examination, he had used the most time to comprehend the first Heavenly Tome Monolith, and it was

possibly going to take him even longer.

In the blink of an eye, the tenth day had arrived.

At five in the morning, Chen Changsheng finally departed the grass hut and went to the monolith hut. He looked at black monolith in silence, his thoughts unknown.

The dawn light gradually flourished and the monolith viewers began to successively enter the mausoleum. Arriving before the monolith hut and seeing him sitting cross-legged under a tree, at first they were shocked, then they had a variety of emotions.

In their eyes, one could find sympathy, one could find mercy, and one could also find ridicule and schadenfreude.

Some people kept their distance from him and walked into the hut. Others purposely walked in front of him, almost seeming to saunter by, then along with the cool breeze that curled around the roof of the hut, they disappeared.

The group from the grass hut, after finishing their breakfast, also arrived.

Seeing this scene, Guan Feibai creased his brow. He said nothing, but touched the monolith and continued on his way.

Tang Thirty-Six stood in front of him and asked, “Do you need me to keep you company?”

Chen Changsheng lifted his head and seriously told him, “For the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, even a shorter amount of time would be precious. You have to treasure these moments.

Tang Thirty-Six was speechless. He thought to himself, “You’ve spent the last ten days playing tourist and cook, and you can still sincerely tell me that.”

Zhexiu said nothing, directly sitting next to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng made no comment.

The morning wind swept through the trees, causing the green leaves to rest upon the roof of the hut.

“Thank you, it’s about time now.” Chen Changsheng sincerely said.

Zhexiu stood up and entered the monolith hut.

This “about time” was not about his hopes of comprehending the monolith, but for Zhexiu keeping him company.

On the twelfth day at noon, the spring sun was particularly luminous. Chen Changsheng sat in the monolith hut, borrowing the roof to keep the sun from hitting him.

With a cool breeze, two youths suddenly appeared in the monolith hut. One of these youths was called Guo En. He was a brilliant student from the Gentle Stream Monastery in the south, under the administration of the Holy Maiden Peak. In the previous year's Grand Examination, he had placed third. The other person was called Mu Nu. Before Zhuang Huanyu, he had been the strongest student from the Heavenly Dao Academy. He had been viewing the monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books for about four years now.

These two youths were once geniuses on the Proclamation of Azure Sky. Yet as time passed and the days which they viewed the monoliths increased, they broke through into Ethereal Opening and had long since entered the Proclamation of Golden Distinction. The northern and southern sects had never gotten along. Outside the mausoleum, the two youths had a relationship like fire and water, but now their relationship was not that bad at all.

“You are Chen Changsheng?” Mu Nu expressionlessly asked him.

Ten days ago, when Zhong Hui had successfully comprehended the monolith, these two people were amongst the crowd, but Chen Changsheng did not recognize them, only knowing that they were probably older entrants of the mausoleum. “Correct. Do you two have some advice for me?”

The corner of Mu Nu's lips moved, as if he was smiling, yet not smiling, but he did not answer.

Guo En shook his head and sighed. “A letter came from my sect saying that this year's Grand Examination produced an

extraordinary individual, but now that I see him, it seems that they really exaggerated it.”

Mu Nu replied, “Otherwise, for a fifteen-year-old to break into Ethereal Opening is truly amazing. It’s just that cultivation is like a sharp blade cutting through bamboo at first, but afterwards it’s stagnant like sand and stone and hard to proceed. In the course of history there have been many of these kinds of people. Keep in mind that the Mausoleum of Books is the real test. This person can’t even pass through the Reflecting Monolith, he may very well be that sort of person. It’s truly lamentable.”

They were looking right at Chen Changsheng, but they were talking to themselves, as if Chen Changsheng did not exist, or perhaps because they did not care for Chen Changsheng’s opinion.

Chen Changsheng was silent for a moment, then he returned to contemplating the monolith.

Guo En and Mu Nu chuckled to themselves, then turned around and began heading down the mountain, but their conversation continued.

“What sort of person is Xu Yourong that she got engaged to him.”

“This is the hope for the revival of the Orthodox Academy? Truly hysterical.”

Not knowing if it was on purpose, their conversation was

incredibly clear, so that even Chen Changsheng could hear it.

A bout of laughter followed from the mountain path.

Chen Changsheng calmly viewed the monolith, as if he did not been affected in the least.

The spring atmosphere gradually deepened.

In the sky, there were several hundred snow geese, returning from some far away place.

They had originally come from the warm lands of the Great Western Continent, and now they were crossing the ocean to return. They were going to Heaven's Pillar Peak to spend the long summer.

The cry of the geese was somewhat tired, but still clear and bright.

In the forest around the monolith hut, the various birds cried out in response. It was as if they were mocking the snow geese for bringing such trouble upon themselves, for being so unbearably stupid.

Chen Changsheng looked up into the blue sky at those two beautiful white lines, and thought about how, as a child in the mountain behind Xining Village, he would play around by chasing that flock of snow geese, and he smiled.

Chapter 224 - The Cry Of The Goose (Part Two)

Suddenly, the bird cries vanished without a trace. It was not known if they ceased because they realized a person even noisier than themselves had arrived. Seeing Tang Thirty-Six appear in front of the monolith, Chen Changsheng was somewhat baffled. Based on what he had observed these past several days, only when the sun had almost set would Tang Thirty-Six be able to pull himself away from the Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

“Do you know who those two people are?” Tang Thirty-Six looked at the mountain path, his brows arched.

“I don’t know their origins, those two...” Chen Changsheng deliberated over his wording for a moment, then said, “They’re what you would call ignorant people.”

Tang Thirty-Six took a look at his face and realized that he did not really care about the deliberate words of ridicule spoken by those two. Somewhat irritated, he asked, “Even if they’re what you call ignorant people, does that mean you don’t care what they call you?”

Chen Changsheng replied, “Let’s not talk about those things, why did you come out?”

Tang Thirty-Six remembered what he had come here to do. He stared at Chen Changsheng in the eye and proudly said, “I’ve seen the third monolith.”

Chen Changsheng was at a loss, “Isn’t that something that happened yesterday?”

Tang Thirty-Six was clearly unsatisfied by his reaction, then said a bit louder, “More importantly, I’m ready to break through.”

Chen Changsheng was startled, then a big smile appeared on his face, and he sincerely said, “Is that so? That’s great.”

Tang Thirty-Six felt somewhat helpless. “I’m almost about to catch up to you. Got it?”

“I’ve always been waiting for this day.” Chen Changsheng’s face was ecstatic. He took a box of medicine from his chest and offered it to Tang Thirty-Six. “Inside I left instructions on how to take the medicine. Breaking through into Ethereal Opening is a big deal, so we can’t afford to be careless. At each step, which medicine to take and at what dosage, not a single mistake can be made. Tonight I’ll ask Zhexiu to help me keep watch over you.”

Within the box were pills that Luoluo had asked the priests of the Li Palace to refine before the Grand Examination. They were made from the valuable medicinal herbs that Tang Thirty-Six and he had stolen from the Hundred Herb Garden, as well as assortments of precious ingredients Luo Luo had asked her clansmen to prepare for them. They were specially prepared for cultivating in Meditation, as well as breaking through into the Ethereal Opening. In terms of medicinal strength, perhaps not even Scholartree Manor’s Crossing Heaven Pill was its better.

Tang Thirty-Six, dumbfounded, took the medicine box. Originally he had wanted to motivate Chen Changsheng a bit, so how did the conversation become like this? Suddenly he thought to himself, if Chen Changsheng was acting this way, could it be that he had already given up on comprehending the monoliths? As he thought of this, his mood immediately became heavy.

The spring became increasingly vibrant. The flocks of snow geese that passed through the capital on their way home to the Great Western State increased in number. Twenty days had passed since the examinees of the Grand Examination had entered the Mausoleum of Books. During that period of time, the examinees had one after the other succeeded in comprehending the Reflecting Monolith. Only Chen Changsheng was left sitting in front of that monolith hut every day. Compared to the liveliness of the first day, the scene in front of the monolith hut was now rather desolate.

Gou Hanshi felt that perhaps there really was a problem with his state of mind. Even Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu were beginning to lose confidence in him. Those Monolith Guardians that had always been watching him from the shadows had already lost interest, not even speaking of the other monolith viewers. Whenever they saw his figure in front of the monolith hut, they could not even hide their looks of derision.

The situation inside the Mausoleum of Books had been accurately conveyed to the capital. The fact that Chen Changsheng was still unable to successfully comprehend the monoliths brought forth a host of different responses. In the Divine General of the East's Mansion, Madam Xu had rarely seen Xu Shiji in such a bad temper. When speaking of the family feast that was scheduled to be held in

just a few days, Xu Shiji descended into silence, even accidentally breaking a famous [Ruyao](#) porcelain cup. In the building of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, the atmosphere was rather oppressive. Everyday, Mei Lisha lay in his room filled with plum flowers, his eyes closed almost as if he were asleep, yet Priest Xin had clearly heard him muttering remorseful words to himself multiple times, “Could it be that we pushed him forward too quickly?”

(TL: Ruyao is a rare type of porcelain that was produced during the era of the Northern Song Dynasty.)

In her leisure hours, Lady Mo Yu would still go to that small building in the Orthodox Academy and lie in Chen Changsheng’s bed. However, the clean youth’s scent was beginning to fade from the bedding, and her mood grew increasingly fidgety as a result. As she read through memorials in the place of the Empress, she rather rudely gave two governors an earful of harsh criticism. Tianhai Shengxue had returned to Snowhold Pass and did not affected by the mood of the current number one family of the continent. Their several mansions in the capital continuously held feasts, scholars and literati wove their way through them like hunting dogs. The clan leader, as well as several key members of the Tianhai clan seemed calm on the surface, but in reality they were relieved.

The fact that Chen Changsheng was incapable of comprehending a monolith sparked numerous discussions in the capital. People all tried to explain the matter, but no matter what they said, it did not seem to make any sense. In the end, the line that the Tianhai clan leader had said in jest at several feasts was adopted as the consensus: “An even more resplendent diamond, if it was burned in such a fierce way, what can be left except a few strands of smoke? It must be known that he’s been burning for an entire year now.”

From the Ivy Festival to the Grand Examination, this youth from Xining Village had given this part of the continent too many shocks, basically miracles. At this point, the Mausoleum of Books had become a tall mountain obstructing his path. There was no one left who believed that this youth would continue to produce any more miracles. They all felt that he would be like those other fallen geniuses in history, disappearing without a sound.

Only one person remained confident in Chen Changsheng. On the top floor of the great hall of the Education Palace, Luo Luo stood at the edge of the railing, her hands shading her eyes. She did not like the false sunlight of this world. No matter how far she looked, she could only see unchanging perfection. She could not see the real world where the Mausoleum of Books was, nor could she see her teacher, who was, at that very moment, viewing the monoliths.

“Teacher has never cared for the hopes that other people placed on him, because he only lives for himself, but has there ever been a time where you placed your hopes on him and he has let you down?”

She turned to Jin Yulu, her beautiful face full of confidence and pride. “I don’t know why he has not deciphered the first Heavenly Tome Monolith even up to now, but I’m very certain that it’s not because he doesn’t know how to, but for some other reason. If he can succeed, then he will absolutely cause everyone to be stunned into silence.”

As promptly as ever, Chen Changsheng awoke at five in the

morning, collected himself, and opened his eyes. He got up, washed his face, rinsed his mouth, made rice, and did some cleaning, before finally proceeding to the Mausoleum of Books.

Of the seasons of the year, it was spring. In a day of the season, it was dawn. The spring dawn was the most beautiful time of day, except it was just a tad bit chilly. Chen Changsheng tightened his collar and sat down in front of the monolith hut. He had already sat here for many days now. Excluding the occasions where he would retreat under the roof to shelter from the rain or the blazing sun, he had never changed that position from day to day. The limestone that he used as a seat had not a speck of dust on it. In fact, its surface seemed somewhat glossy.

Chen Changsheng had read Xun Mei's notebook from cover to cover many times now, and he had long ago committed its words to his heart. The complex lines, that made up the monolith inscriptions, had long ago been deeply embedded into his sea of consciousness. Although there was not enough time to see how those inscriptions changed throughout all four of the seasons, he had already grasped the day-to-day changes. He no longer needed to see the monolith anymore and directly closed his eyes.

There were footsteps in the distance that hurriedly walked by him, and there were footsteps that slowly walked right by him. There was the low whisper of discussion on the mountain path, as well as the clear sound of ridicule by his ear. Those voices all slowly disappeared, leaving behind the quiet woods and the song of the birds.

The cry of the birds amidst the forest suddenly seemed to crowd

together, then from up high in the sky came the cry of the geese. Amongst these cries, one of them was particularly clear and bright.

Chen Changsheng opened his eyes and looked up at the azure sky. He only saw a flock of snow geese flying from the east. This was one of countless flocks of snow geese that had returned to the capital. The appearance of so much snow made the spring sky seem all the more beautiful. He thought to himself, the goose that gave that particularly clear and bright cry, perhaps it was that of a chick, or maybe this was its first time going on such a long journey.

The flock of snow geese flew off into the distance. Perhaps they would rest in the capital for a few days, then continue their journey west.

“I suppose this is it.”

Chen Changsheng said these words with some regret as he stood up and walked into the monolith hut.

Seeing the ice-cold monolith, as well as those lines which he had seen so many times he was sick of them, he shook his head. He thought to himself that his skills were truly still lacking.

For him, as well as all the other members of the grass hut seven, Xun Mei's notebook had brought enormous benefits in terms of comprehending the monoliths. For Guan Feibai and the others to comprehend the monoliths so smoothly, the notebook had allowed them to draw closer to the wisdom of their worthy predecessor and

achieve various enlightenments. As for the benefits he obtained, there were many points of reference.

In the notebook, Xun Mei had left behind many lines of thinking for comprehending the monoliths. For the Reflecting monolith alone, he had left more than ten, but in Wang Zhice's notebook, which Chen Changsheng had found in the Pavilion of Ascending Mist, the first line he had read said that "The positions are relative", and so what Chen Changsheng aimed to do was not follow those lines of thinking to comprehend the monoliths, but to completely avoid them and create a new path.

By means of observing the monolith inscriptions amidst the natural changes of heaven and earth, he would find an answer that was completely his own. This was how he wanted to comprehend the monoliths.

This line of thinking was most likely correct, but under his standards, it was far from perfect, or in other words, it was not pure enough. It was still a variation of the three most traditional and mainstream methods: take the idea, take the shape, and take the move. In other words, this method had still not broken away from those intrinsic lines of thinking.

He was unsatisfied, so he had spent the past twenty days in deep thought. Regretfully, he had not met with success.

Most importantly, it was just as he had told Gou Hanshi, his Dao was to follow his heart. He had always felt that all those methods, including those used by countless past experts and saints, were all wrong. He felt that the Mausoleum of Books and those monoliths

still held some deeper meaning. That was what he wanted to see.

It was truly regretful that he did not have more time.

That clear and bright cry caused him to wake up. Time had passed too quickly. In the blink of an eye, only several days remained before the opening of the Garden of Zhou.

On the first day they entered the Mausoleum of Books, Gou Hanshi had asked him, did he want to go to the Garden of Zhou, or did he want to stay in the Mausoleum of Books for a bit longer. Back then, Chen Changsheng had said he was still thinking, but over the past few days he had made it clear to himself which choice he would make.

If he could not change his fate, or cultivate until the Concealed Spirit Realm, then he only had five years left to live.

Of course, he wanted to go to more places, see more sights, get to know more people.

He wanted to go to the Garden of Zhou, he demanded to go to the Garden of Zhou. Then, he would have to start comprehending the monoliths.

Thus, he began to comprehend the monoliths.

He lifted his right hand and pointed at some place towards the top of the monolith. “This is the character for ‘house’ (家).”

With the angle of light at this moment, amongst the complicated lines on the surface of the monolith, several of the shallower lines seemed to float in the light. One could faintly make out a character in these lines.

Then he pointed at another place on the monolith. “This is the character for river (江).”

Immediately, without pause, he pointed towards the top of the monolith at a mess of lines from which no one would be able to make out a character and said, “Gentle (淡).”

“Smoke (烟).”

“Reflect (照).”

“Eave (檐)”

“Autumn (秋).”

“Patch (丛).”

In the blink of an eye, he had, without pause, named twenty-eight characters, all of which were on the monolith.

The last character was light (光).

His voice was clear and bright, very similar to the cry of that goose. It was a voice of expectation, filled with that confidence and fearlessness of the unknown world.

Then, a cool breeze blew.

He vanished from in front of the monolith.

Chapter 225 - Comprehending All The Monoliths Of The Front Mausoleum In One Day

The twenty-eight characters that Chen Changsheng had seen on the stone monolith formed a poem.

“The foggy woods are reflected in the smoky river water, Houses with painted eaves on the banks are adjacent to each other. Gently on the patches of lotuses shines the autumnal light. The pearl-woven curtains are bathed in the fragrant wind of ten miles.”

This poem was written down by the leader of the Way two thousand years ago when he had viewed the monoliths in the mausoleum. The first Heavenly Tome monolith in the Mausoleum of Books was called Reflecting because of this poem.

Chen Changsheng used the comprehension method to extract this passage of monolith inscriptions, and understood its meaning.

This method of comprehension was actually very simple, and very primitive.

Countless years ago, when the Heavenly Tomes landed on the continent, the still-ignorant predecessors conquered their cowardice, and carefully arrived in front of this stone monolith.

The predecessor, who had first understood this stone monolith, also used a similar method. However, what he saw perhaps was a

simple image. This image could be cows, sheep, or even dragons. Afterwards, some people saw even more complicated images in the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, with numbers and even more information. As a result, there were characters.

This method was also the cleanest, as it did not have any other distracting thoughts layering on top of it.

At the very beginning, these predecessors definitely did not believe that these weird stones hid secrets that needed to be understood, and would not believe that there was any flow of true essence in those lines.

Just like how he had discussed with Gou Hanshi before.

The leader of the Way two thousand years ago saw a poem from this Heavenly Tome monolith. He thought that this poem was a question. In the countless following years, countless cultivators had all once tried to find the true answer from this poem, but they always gained nothing.

Today, Chen Changsheng also saw the poem. However, this did not mean that he had used the completely same method of comprehension as that peerless expert from two thousand years ago. This was because he did not believe this poem was a question, and believed that this was what the Heavenly Tome monolith wanted to relay to others.

The daylight varied in brightness. Some lines showed, while others did not. The incomparably complicated lines could reveal

countless words.

These words had countless permutations. They could form a poem, or they could form a great verse.

The stone monolith could not speak, and became a piece of text in itself.

He had sat in front of this stone monolith for over twenty days, and did not know how many characters he had seen. Now, he could find countless works of poetry that already existed in the mortal world. However, he understood very clearly that these poems all originated from the inscriptions of this Heavenly Tome monolith.

The comprehenders of the monoliths only needed to find it, see it, and understand it. They did not need other extra thoughts.

Of the myriad of monolith comprehension methods in the world, no matter if it was by idea, by shape or by moves, it was all to comprehend, learn, and copy the information on the monoliths.

However, the Heavenly Tome monoliths never waited for people to come comprehend, learn, and copy.

The Heavenly Tome monoliths always waited for people to come to understand it.

Chen Changsheng tried to demonstrate this point, and in the

end, the Mausoleum of Books confirmed that his understanding was correct.

As a result, he comprehended the first Heavenly Tome monolith, and then saw the second monolith.

Deep within the dense forest, there was a monolith within the hut, and by the side of the monolith, there was also an engraved poem. This poem was raised by a certain renowned scholar, and the poem was called [Cloud Piercing Stone](#).

TL: 贯云石, literal translation Cloud Piercing Stone, is an ancient Chinese poet.

The second Heavenly Tome monolith was called the Cloud Piercing Monolith because of this.

About twenty people sat on the outskirts around the monolith hut. Those people stared at the slightly flat and wide stone monolith within the hut. Some had their eyebrows furrowed and were in deep thought, while others mumbled to themselves.

Chen Changsheng arrived in front of the monolith, and saw a few familiar faces in the group of people.

That junior called Ye Xiaolian from the Holy Maiden peak raised her head as she heard the sound of footsteps. Seeing that the person was him, she could not help but stare blankly.

Some people also realized that Chen Changsheng had come, and

stared blankly, just like her. In the past few days, those who had viewed the tablets in the Mausoleum of Books had already gotten used to seeing Chen Changsheng outside the Reflecting Monolith hut. However, today, they suddenly saw him arrive in front of the Cloud Piercing Monolith, and actually could not respond in time.

Only in the next moment did everybody realize. As it turned out, Chen Changsheng had finally comprehended the first Heavenly Tome monolith.

There were some slight disturbances in the people outside the monolith hut, and afterwards, there were provocative discussions.

“To only comprehend the first monolith now. What is there to be arrogant about?”

“Indeed. I always thought that my own talent in comprehension was bad, but looking at it now, at least it is better than some people’s.”

Chen Changsheng was not arrogant. However, his appearance brought a type of pressure to the people outside the monolith hut. It was just like a student who had extremely good grades suddenly place last in a certain subject. The students of the lower half would laugh at his misfortune for several days, before suddenly discovering that that student was actually slowly catching up, how could they not be worried?

Especially thinking of the mocking from several days ago, some people were bound to be slightly worried.

In order to rid themselves of this pressure, to wipe away their worry, even meaner mocking obviously occurred.

Chen Changsheng ignored these discussions, and continued forwards. Walking into the monolith hut, arriving in front of the Cloud Piercing Monolith, he raised his right hand.

There were cries of alarm from outside the monolith hut.

The news that Chen Changsheng had comprehended the Reflection Monolith was like the wind. It spread out of the mausoleum with lightning speed, entering various estates in the capital, and also spread to the royal palace and the Li palace.

Upon hearing this news, some people finally relaxed a little, such as the archbishop, Mei Lisha, while Prince Chen Liu's happy laughter resounded throughout the prince's estate. Mo Yu currently held a pen, and was dipping it in cinnabar. Hearing the report from her subordinate, she was slightly startled. She then said in a slightly joking manner, "Only comprehending the first tablet now. What sort of future does he have?"

Many students of the Heavenly Dao Academy were in a feast at a restaurant, so they naturally were bound to mention the Mausoleum of Books and comprehending monoliths. Just when they were laughing at Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy, they received this news. The room immediately became silent, and a while later, a student laughed at him, "With this speed, whether Chen Changsheng is able to comprehend the

second monolith in this year is still a problem. Senior Zhuang has already arrived in front of the third monolith. How can they be compared at all?”

Another student said with a sigh, “Gou Hanshi is even more terrifying. Can he be ranked within the top three in the past ten years?”

Hearing Gou Hanshi’s name, the previous student stayed silent for a while, before saying, “If he can maintain his comprehension speed, then perhaps he could be ranked with the top ten within the past hundred years.”

Just at this moment, a student of the Heavenly Dao Academy hurriedly sprinted to the second floor. His face was full of sweat, and carried an expression of fright that he could not hide. He said with a trembling voice, “Chen Changsheng..... has just comprehended the second monolith.

Hearing this, several students of the Heavenly Dao Academy were greatly surprised, and all stood up in a rush. They actually knocked over several dishes of food and wine on the table.

They looked at the student, and asked consecutively in an disbelieving manner.

“What!”

“How is that possible!”

“Didn’t he just comprehend the first monolith? How can comprehend the second monolith so quickly?”

No one was able to answer their questions.

The restaurant immediately fell into a deathly stillness.

Of the seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum, the third was called the Bent Osmanthus. It must be known that the further back the monoliths were, the harder they were to comprehend. He had only entered the monolith for twenty odd days, and had already arrived in front of the third monolith. It already could be said to be extremely outstanding.

Seeing Chen Changsheng appear, people were very surprised. It was because that morning, he had obviously been seen outside the first monolith hut. Did this not mean that he used the period of half a day to consecutively comprehend two monoliths? Tang Thirty-Six directly leapt up from the ground, and walked up to Chen Changsheng. With his two eyes rounded, he said, “I say, what are you doing?”

It seemed to be slightly ill-mannered, but in actuality, his eyes that looked at Chen Changsheng were full of joy.

Chen Changsheng did not know how to explain.

Zhexiu’s expression was still very indifferent. However, his eyes

began to glow vaguely. He said, “There must be a reason.”

Chen Changsheng thought a little, and said, “Firstly, the Heavenly Tomes, should be tomes.”

Hearing this, some people outside the monolith hut seemed to fall into deep thought. Zhuang Huanyu instead gave out a cold sneer.

Chen Changsheng said to Tang Thirty-Six, “I will be leaving first.”

“You’re going to leave just like this? Well it is right, you should rest properly.”

Tang Thirty-six said subconsciously. For Chen Changsheng to use the period of half a day to comprehend two Heavenly Tome monoliths, it definitely would have taken up a lot of his mental strength, so he indeed should return to the grass hut to rest.

Chen Changsheng stared blankly, and pointed to the monolith hut. He said, “I am talking about over there.”

Tang Thirty-Six was stupefied. He stared blankly at him as Chen Changsheng walked to the front of the monolith and extended his hand towards it..

Seeing this, Zhuang Huanyu’s expression suddenly changed.

Zhong Hui, who sat in the monolith hut and always stayed silent, also became incomparably pale.

The fourth Heavenly Tome monolith was called the River Guiding Monolith. This monolith just happened to be on the side of a cliff, so its location was slightly dangerous.

There were many people in front of the monolith hut. Since entering the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths, nobody of the top three grades from the Grand Examination in the previous year had left. They were basically all there.

Qi Jian sat closest to the outer edge of the monolith hut. His skinny, weak body was buffeted by the wind from the cliff. It always gave people a tottering feeling.

Chen Changsheng was slightly surprised. This youngest junior of the Mount Li Sword Sect was actually had even faster comprehension than Guan Feibai and Liang Banhu.

Of course, those who were the most surprised were still Qi Jian and the others there.

Seeing him walk up to the side of Qi Jian and sitting down, people revealed a shocked expression.

Compared to the previous three Heavenly Tome monoliths, the inscriptions on the River Guiding Monolith were actually simpler.

Speaking more precisely, it should have been that the lines on the monolith were just as complicated, but there already seemed to vaguely be some sort of rules. With rules, it was not necessarily a good matter to those who viewed the tablets, as their mind would instead be disturbed more easily, in other word, constraining them.

After saying a few words to Qi Jian, Chen Changsheng focused his gaze on the stone monolith, and began to study it seriously.

“Back then, how many days did it take us to reach the River Guiding Monolith?”

In the empty great hall of the Li Palace, the voice of a Sacred Hall archbishop resounded. He looked at the several dozens of sculptures of the virtuous members of previous generations. His expression was slightly disappointed, and there was also a sliver of shock visible in his eyes.

Another Sacred Hall archbishop, who was also one of the prefects of the Orthodoxy, did not answer the questions, and only said after a period of silence, “Although the front mausoleum is easy to comprehend, this is just a little too quick.”

Perhaps, some people viewed it as Chen Changsheng had used over twenty days to arrive in front of the fourth Heavenly Tome monolith, however he who was such great personage of the Orthodoxy naturally knew to not count in such a fashion. From comprehending monoliths to now, Chen Changsheng had only used the time of half a day, so it was just half a day.

“To reach Ethereal Opening in just a year of cultivation, and reach the River Guiding Monolith with half a day’s worth of comprehension.....He is worthy of being the child His Holiness has thought highly of.”

Conversations like this occurred everywhere in the capital. Only like this could it neutralize the wave that Chen Changsheng had created.

The current Chen Changsheng was no longer like before, directly moving on after comprehending a monolith. When the news of him sitting in front of the River Guiding Monolith was announced, many people relaxed at the same time. Those people did not antagonise Chen Changsheng, such as Prince Chen Liu and Priest Xin. They only felt that the whole thing was too unrealistic. At this moment, Chen Changsheng had stopped his advance, and instead made them feel that what occurred today was somewhat realistic. Gou Hanshi’s performance in the mausoleum in those days already shocked the entire capital. Chen Changsheng’s current performance was even more flabbergasting. If he were to continue, who would be able to stand it?

However, just like how it was often said, reality was often even more unbelievable than imagination. Not long after, everybody within the capital learnt a piece of news.

Chen Changsheng stood up from the side of the cliff.

He walked into the tablet hut.

He had finished comprehending the River Guiding Monolith.

Following closely, Chen Changsheng comprehended the fifth Heavenly Tome monolith—the Fowl Language Monolith.

Chen Changsheng arrived in front of the sixth Heavenly Tome monolith.

This monolith was called the Eastern Pavilion Monolith.

The person who placed first on the First Banner last year in the Grand Examination, Liang Xiaoxiao, the Third Law of the Divine Kingdom, had spent the past couple of months trying to comprehend this monolith.

When he saw Chen Changsheng, his cold and arrogant expression immediately disappeared, the only thing that remained in his gaze was shock and intense confusion.

Chen Changsheng nodded his head towards him in greeting. However, his steps never stopped.

In front of the seventh Heavenly Tome monolith, there was only Gou Hanshi himself.

He currently gazed at the far away mountains. Hearing the sound of footsteps, he turned around to only realize Chen Changsheng

had actually come. He could not help but slightly raise a brow.

Chen Changsheng walked over to Gou Hanshi's side.

Gou Hanshi stayed silent for a while, before saying, "Impressive."

Chen Changsheng did not know what he should have said, so he did not speak.

Looking at him, Gou Hanshi began to feel deeply moved. He said, "For the first time, I feel that you may be a possible rival of my senior."

His senior was Qiushan Jun. Even up til now, he had still felt that Chen Changsheng barely had the qualification.

Chen Changsheng stayed silent for a while, before saying, "There are still problems with the method of comprehension. It is just that there is not enough time, so I can only first proceed and then see how it goes."

Gou Hanshi sighed, "First proceed and see how it goes? If someone else were to hear these words, other than resentment, what else would they be able to feel?"

Chen Changsheng glanced at the monolith, and said, "I am about to leave."

Gou Hanshi did not misunderstand him like Tang Thirty-Six. He looked at him and said, “Looks like you have decided to go to the Garden of Zhou.”

Chen Changsheng thought about it, and said, “I’ll first proceed, then see how it goes.”

These words were said once more.

To many monolith comprehenders, if they wanted to take a step forwards in the Mausoleum of Books, it was as difficult as reaching the sky.

However, to him today, it was like a casual stroll.

There were two people in front of the eighth Heavenly Tome monolith.

He had seen these two people. A few days ago, they had once specially come to the Reflecting Monolith hut to see him, and said a few words to him.

On that night, Tang Thirty-Six had told him the history of the surnames of these two people.

Seeing Chen Changsheng, the two people looked as if they had seen the Demon Lord. Their faces were full of shock.

Chen Changsheng walked towards the monolith hut, and suddenly stopped. He turned around and looked at them. He said, “You are Guo En and Mu Nu?”

In front of the monolith hut that day, they had asked him, “You’re Chen Changsheng?”

Chen Changsheng was not a timid, bun-selling young girl after all. He was an upright, youthful teenager, so how could he not have a temper at all?

So before he left, he also asked that.

In the lingering breeze around the monolith hut, Guo En and Mu Nu’s faces became incomparably red, in a heated flush.

Arriving in front of the eleventh Heavenly Tome monolith, it finally became quiet. The gurgling sounds of water from the nearby clear, small stream was very pleasant to the ear.

With Chen Changsheng’s cultivation level, he did not know that there were several Heavenly Tome Monolith Guardians looking attentively at him from afar.

Ji Jin’s expression was extremely unsightly. That night, in order to help Zhong Hui break through, his consumption was extreme, which was very difficult for him to recover from.

Nian Guang looked at Chen Changsheng walking towards the side of the stream. He stayed silent, but his feelings were extremely complicated.

The Orthodoxy had ordered him to look after Chen Changsheng in the Mausoleum of Books. He did not do anything, because whether it was before or now, he did not need to do anything at all.

Many years ago, he had been a student specially nurtured by the Temple Seminary. However, he was pressured by the group of geniuses from the Orthodox Academy so badly that it even limited his breathing. In the end, only after all his hopes and dreams had been destroyed, he decided to go to the Mausoleum of Books to become a Monolith Guardian. Seeing Chen Changsheng comprehend ten Heavenly Tome monoliths in one day, he very naturally thought of the people from the Orthodox Academy. Speaking normally, he should have been somewhat furious, but for some reason, he was slightly relieved. Just like over ten years ago, after he learnt that those geniuses that had once pressured him to the point where he could not even breathe were all killed, he did not feel happy, but instead felt slightly sad.

A Monolith Guardian said, “He is the fastest one in the past decade, even faster than Wang Po and Xiao Zhang all those years ago.”

Nian Guang stayed silent for a while, before saying, “Not just faster, he is much faster. So fast that he has reached a universally shocking level.”

Chen Changsheng walked to the side of the stream. He washed

his face and felt much more awake, before continuing to comprehend monoliths.

Seeing the breeze of the monolith hut begin to blow, the Monolith Guardians did not say anything.

Naturally, there were many people that had walked even further than Chen Changsheng in the Mausoleum of Books. Ignoring a monolith comprehender like Xun Mei, there were still cultivators that had viewed monoliths for hundreds of years in the seventh mausoleum.

However.... Chen Changsheng had only used a day's worth of time.

Ji Jin thought back to all those years ago when he first arrived at the eleventh monolith. He had used a whole seven years. For a long time, he could not help but be absentminded, with never previously existed doubt blooming in his cultivation. His spiritual sense shook and was not calm. The injuries caused by the consumption a few days ago began to act up secretly. He held onto an old tree beside him, staggering and sobbing.

Nian Guang and the others did not notice his abnormal action, as they were still submerged in shock.

“If he was not surnamed Zhou, then I really would have wondered if he was the descendant of that person.....”

Twilight invaded the sky, and he finally felt a shred of fatigue.

He gazed off into the distance, and also saw that the capital in the dusk was incomparably magnificent.

He stood there quietly for a while, before turning around. Facing the setting sun, he walked into the monolith hut.

The front mausoleum of the Mausoleum of Books only had seventeen monoliths in total. This was the final one.

Before, there was Zhou Dufu. Today, there was Chen Changsheng.

Comprehending all the monoliths of the front mausoleum in a single day.

Chapter 226 - The Broken Monolith

“Fourteen years without cultivation, only reading, then only one year was needed to break into Ethereal Opening. Twenty days without comprehending the monoliths, only calmly sitting... then in one day he saw and comprehended all the monoliths in the entire front mausoleum.”

After the Pope had learned of what had happened in the mausoleum, he delivered these two lines of commentary on Chen Changsheng. Assisted by several powerful figures within the Orthodoxy, these two lines of commentary, like the glow of the sunset, quickly spread throughout the capital. The shocked populace once again looked to the south, towards the Mausoleum of Books, with every kind of emotion.

The last time someone had been able to view all the monoliths of the front mausoleum in a single day was countless years ago, and that man was Zhou Dufu. Today, Chen Changsheng had performed the same deed. Did that mean that he was the second coming of Zhou Dufu? Yet there was a certain incomprehensible matter that some people took note of. According the news that had come out of the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng’s cultivation did not change as he viewed the monoliths. He still remained at the initial stage of Ethereal Opening. It must be known that the year that Zhou Dufu rambled about in the mausoleum, whenever his eyes rested on a monolith and his foot entered a hut, his cultivation would incessantly change. To take what those who had entered the mausoleum just this year had said, even Scholartree Manor’s Zhong Hui had broken through into Ethereal Opening. There were also many people like Tang Thirty-Six who could see the possibility of breaking through. Logically, after Chen Changsheng had finished viewing seventeen monoliths, as a matter of course,

he should have obtained some sort of enlightenment. Even if he did not break through into a completely new realm, he should still have received some benefit.

Priest Xin supported Archbishop Mei Lisha to the Li Palace. After paying homage to the Pope, Mei Lisha brought up the discussion currently spreading around the capital. After a moment's hesitation he also added, "There are many people who are suspicious. They believe that perhaps Chen Changsheng used some sort of trick, or even that we in the Orthodoxy taken some sort of action in the Mausoleum of Books."

"Enlightenment is enlightenment. Comprehending the monoliths has always depended on the cultivation of the individual cultivator. No one is able to really change that."

The Pope took up a wooden ladle and began watering the Green Leaf as he spoke. "I don't believe that child will have the chance to catch up Zhou Dufu's performance that year. After all, it requires extraordinary courage, as well as the right temperament. His performance is already outstanding and I am quite satisfied, one could even say that I'm surprised."

Mei Lisha responded, "What I most want to know is what his response will be when he sees that last monolith. Will he be as shocked and surprised as we were by his actions today?"

The Pope's wooden ladle hovered above the Green Leaf, slightly tilted, as if he were thinking about something and had gotten lost in thought. Miraculously, not a drop of water spilled from the ladle.

Priest Xin stood startled at one side, uncomprehendingly wondering, Chen Changsheng had already deciphered all seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum, how could there be one more?

The Pope shook his head and resumed watering. “Even if he does see it, don’t tell me he’ll be able to decipher it as well?”

Mei Lisha smiled. “That child has already amazed us so many times. To do so one more time is not that unthinkable.”

In the crimson twilight, the Dew Platform seemed to be ablaze, as if it were a massive torch. The Divine Empress stood at the edge of the platform, her hands clasped behind her back, as she looked towards the Mausoleum of Books. On her indifferent expression appeared a trace of ridicule. “They both viewed the entire front mausoleum in one day, but that year Zhou Dufu actually understood the monoliths. Chen Changsheng is still far away from comparing to him.”

Of the people living on the continent today, only she and the Pope could be considered to have actually met Zhou Dufu. They could even be considered acquaintances. Only they understood the terrifying degree of strength that the continent’s strongest cultivator had held, so they believed it was simply impossible for Chen Changsheng’s name to even be said in the same sentence as that man.

Mo Yu stood behind her and could not help but say, “But viewing

seventeen monoliths in one day can already be considered rather extraordinary. At the very least, it's much better than my performance."

The Divine Empress did not turn around. She continued to gaze at the Mausoleum of Books, remembering all those aged and white-haired cultivators that, since ancient times, had viewed the monoliths, and the sense of derision about her grew increasingly more distinct. "In the end, why is it that cultivators view the monoliths? Why is it that some people never understand that viewing the monoliths is not the purpose of cultivating the Dao, but a method for cultivating the Dao?"

"When Empress ordered the rankings to be destroyed that year, it was to teach the people of the world to not go astray. It is a pity that no one understood the Empress's labors." Mo Yu softly said.

"Yes, if one's cultivation or enlightenment in the Dao has not advanced, then even if one comprehended every monolith in the mausoleum, what use would it be? That year when I ordered Zhou Tong to destroy that ranking in front of the mausoleum. Many of those old fools in the Orthodoxy came to me weeping tears saying that I wasn't respecting the ancestors. Now that I think of it, I should have had that lot of senile fools killed."

The Divine Empress continued indifferently, "Even if the Heavenly Tome Monoliths are sacred objects, it is only when they are used by the people do they actually have meaning. True, Chen Changsheng's speed in comprehending the monoliths was certainly faster than yours, but that year in the mausoleum you succeeded in entering the Star Condensation realm. And him?

Even if he comprehended every last one of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, if none of it did anything for his cultivation, then it isn't worth a damn thing."

These words had come up twice and they held the same meaning, but the first was for the cultivators of the world, while the second was aimed directly at Chen Changsheng.

Mo Yu was alarmed, but then smiled. So even the Divine Empress could use such vulgar language, she thought to herself. It would seem that Chen Changsheng's performance in the mausoleum still caused the Empress to be somewhat vigilant.

Of course, what she was wary of was not Chen Changsheng himself, but the Orthodoxy who stood behind him.

Mo Yu did not conceal her emotions. This was why she had been able to earn the favor and dotage of the Empress.

She opened her large eyes and asked curiously, "Then in Empress's view...will Chen Changsheng have a chance?"

The Divine Empress contemplated the Mausoleum of Books in silence, then said, "Perhaps if he is able to view that final monolith, only...he is too unflustered, yet so young. He gives off the unlikeable scent of sour decay, completely unlike the Zhou Dufu of that year. He was as glorious as the morning sun, as vigorous as a hurricane. He would berate the heavens and curse the earth, all to ask a single question."

Mo Yu slightly frowned. She always felt that whenever the Empress brought up that peerless expert, her mood would seemingly become unsteady.

“To cultivate the Dao is to cultivate the heart. One’s nature determines one’s fate, and it will also decide how far one is able to walk in the Dao.”

The Divine Empress announced her final conclusion. “Chen Changsheng...is not able.”

After comprehending the seventeenth monolith, Chen Changsheng arrived at a lush and verdant meadow.

In the twilight, the entire Mausoleum of Books seemed to be on fire, this meadow being no exception. An intangible wildfire rolled across the meadow, creating a breathtaking scene.

From the cliff under the meadow came the rumbling of water. He realized that he had arrived at the southwest face of the mausoleum, where that waterfall originated.

The wind from the cliffs carried up a mist of water, which landed on his face. It was a little wet and a little cold, but it washed away his exhaustion.

He thought back to today’s course of events. Although there were some places where he was not satisfied, he could not but feel somewhat happy, to think that he was pretty good.

Suddenly, he felt something, and the cheer on his face gradually retreated to be replaced with confusion.

He turned around, and saw that, in the meadow, under a white cliff, was another monolith hut.

He had deciphered the seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum, so according to the records of the Daoist Canon, he should have been sent to the next mausoleum.

But this was definitely still the front mausoleum.

The structure of that monolith hut was no different than that of the Reflecting Monolith or the River Guiding Monolith.

Chen Changsheng was rather surprised. Could there possibly be another Heavenly Tome Monolith in the front mausoleum?

Front mausoleum of the Mausoleum of Books had seventeen monoliths. This was a fact that everyone knew. Unless someone had been concealing this fact, but who would conceal it? Chen Changsheng suddenly remembered when he was studying the Daoist Classics back in Xining Village, with regards to the world's way of speaking, at the very beginning the Mausoleum of Books did not have any sort of front or back mausoleum.

Standing amidst the blazing meadow, he did not hesitate for long. He stepped forward and began walking towards the monolith

hut. As he broke through the weeds, it was as if he was stamping out the fire, or a fishing boat rowing through a river as thousands of fish scales gleamed in the light.

Walking in front of the monolith hut, he stopped and looked in. What he saw was a scene he could never have imagined, and could not help but stare.

This monolith hut had no Heavenly Tome Monolith. To be more precise, this monolith hut once had a Heavenly Tome Monolith, but now that monolith had disappeared without a trace, only leaving a pedestal. On this pedestal was a somewhat conspicuous protrusion of spoiled stone, about half a palm wide and very short. Perhaps it was all that remained of the Heavenly Tome Monolith?

Chen Changsheng's body became as incredibly rigid. The previous joy and relaxation had long since been replaced by shock and surprise.

The front mausoleum of the Mausoleum of Book actually had eighteen monoliths. This was already surprising already. Yet what was even more unfathomable was that the last monolith was actually this broken monolith!

He stood in front of the monolith hut in a daze for a very long time, then gradually was able to collect his wits and suppress that fierce shock and unease. He walked up to that broken monolith and realized that on this small chunk, there were no lines or characters. In other words, the monolith inscriptions were all on the piece of the monolith that had been broken off.

He rubbed the surface of that broken monolith, feeling the hardness of the monolith stone, how after countless years of wind and snow, its edges still remained as sharp as ever. An expression of frustration slowly grew on his face.

This monolith had clearly been broken by some extremely great power.

In the beginning, when the Heavenly Tome Monoliths fell to the earth, the base of the monoliths began to grow roots that connected them deep into the earth on their own.

In the three thousand classics of the Daoist Canons, amongst countless stories, there was not a single one that said that the Heavenly Tome Monoliths could be broken and carried out of the mausoleum.

Then where did this power come from to be powerful enough to break this Heavenly Tome Monolith?

If it was a human, then who was this human?

How did that person do it?

Where did he take that piece of the Heavenly Tome Monolith?

Chen Changsheng looked around in frustration at the blazing

meadow.

The twilight deepened and the night seeped in. The mountain winds gradually became colder.

He felt somewhat chilly.

The joy and satisfaction he felt had long since departed. The shock from seeing the broken monolith had also vanished without a trace.

His mind had already become somewhat numb.

His heart was filled with boundless reverence and even fear.

Is that what real power was like?

The Mausoleum of Books became shrouded in darkness.

Along with the disappearance of the last rays of sunset, the stars in the sky once again occupied the sky as well as the eyes of man.

Chen Changsheng stood outside the monolith hut, staring motionlessly at the starry sky.

He remained in this position for a very long time.

He had been accompanied by that shadow for so many years, that in the end, he was no ordinary youth.

Although he had not reached the point where he was able to laugh in the face of death, but after using so much time, an even stronger power would be unable to affect his mind.

He turned around and walked into the monolith hut, and once again stood before the broken monolith.

Chapter 227 - Thus We Shall Perceive Them (Part One)

Standing in front of the broken monolith, Chen Changsheng was not actually thinking about it, nor was he attempting to recall some story from long ago. Rather, he was thinking about his own problems.

What he understood was that not all monolith viewers would be able to come before this broken monolith.

In that case, he really wanted to know just what exactly having the ability to see this broken monolith signified.

It was just as some people in the capital had already realized, and also what the Divine Empress had said to Mo Yu on the Dew Platform. Viewing the entire front mausoleum in the span of one day truly did have few problems. He had comprehended the monolith inscriptions, but had made no attempt to extract any further messages. Thus, he naturally was not enlightened by any sort of true meaning outside of what was written on the monolith inscriptions.

He had very easily read through the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, but it seemed that he had obtained no benefits.

However, this was not the problem. At the very least, it was not the problem that he was currently pondering about and worrying over.

Disregarding any philosophical reasons, the reason Chen Changsheng had not used any of the three most common and most traditional methods of taking shape, taking ideas, and taking moves was very simple: his meridians were defective. His true essence had no means of flowing through his broken meridians. Thus, even if his true essence were to be even more abundant, it would have no meaning. Therefore, he had to find a new method.

He seemed to have achieved enormous success, having become the second person after Zhou Dufu to comprehend the entire front mausoleum in a day, but he had always felt that there was something wrong.

It was the same sort of hesitation and helplessness he had felt when he had decided to begin comprehending the monoliths.

The method that he had used was rather ingenious, but it was still a variation on the method of taking the idea.

He had originally thought that after he had finished comprehending the seventeen monoliths one after the other, he would no longer care about such a thing. However, now that he had seen this broken monolith, he finally understood: to be unsatisfied was to be unsatisfied. He could cheat the heavens and cheat the earth, cheat a king and cheat a saint, cheat his father or cheat his mother, but he could not cheat himself.

The front mausoleum of the Mausoleum of Books had always contained eighteen monoliths, but it was currently missing one.

Therefore, even if he deciphered seventeen monoliths, it would still be incomplete.

This sense of incompleteness weighed upon his spirit, making him uncomfortable.

It was just like his method for comprehending the monoliths. It was indeed very powerful, but in the end, it was only a type of compromise.

For the sake of going to the Garden of Zhou, he had deciphered the monoliths as fast as possible, thus renouncing those twenty odd days of persistent seeking.

To comprehend the entire front mausoleum in one day was truly impressive, but, in his view, was it not a type of failure?

The Dao he cultivated was to follow his heart, and in the end, the heart was hard to satisfy.

He stood in front of the broken monolith for a long time, but he ultimately was unable to come up with anything, so he began his descent from the mountain.

In the dim light of the night, the monolith huts by the path were exceptionally quiet. Not a single person could be seen.

Accompanied by the starlight, he soon walked past seventeen monolith huts, finally returning to the front of the Reflecting Monolith.

Outside the Reflecting Monolith's monolith hut, a dense mass of people had gathered.

As it turned out, those monolith viewers who would have normally been sitting in front of the various monolith huts, had all gathered here.

They had been waiting for Chen Changsheng.

Seeing his figure appear from outside the monolith hut, the crowd grew restless.

Tang Thirty-Six stepped forward, looked him in the eye, and said, "Seventeen monoliths?"

Chen Changsheng nodded his head.

Tang Thirty-Six laughed heartily, then heavily patted Chen Changsheng's shoulder several times. He turned around to face the crowd and shouted, "Seventeen monoliths!"

The murmur of discussion suddenly ceased, and the area around the monolith hut became silent.

The crowd looked at Chen Changsheng, speechless from surprise.

Ye Xiaolian opened her eyes wide and looked at Chen Changsheng, her mood somewhat strange. Could it be that there was someone in this world that could match up to senior Qiu? Seventeen monoliths, perhaps senior Qiu... would also find that difficult to accomplish? She thought of how, back in the Li Palace on the Divine Avenue, she had attempted to shame Chen Changsheng. She could not help but feel thoroughly embarrassed, and she lowered her head.

Chen Changsheng said nothing. Together with Tang Thirty-Six, he headed down the mountain path.

Countless pairs of eyes, full of admiration and even awe, followed him.

A normal person would no doubt become a little intoxicated under the gazes of so many people.

If he had departed like this, the gazes and the starlight that fell upon him would become his glory.

However, after a moment, he stopped.

Astonished, Tang Thirty-Six glanced at him.

Chen Changsheng stood still for a while, then suddenly turned around and walked back to the monolith hut.

“What’s wrong? Did you drop something in there?” Tang Thirty-Six asked in confusion.

Chen Changsheng did not respond. He walked over to the forest at the edge of the monolith hut, lifted the lapel of shirt, and just like that, sat down.

Just like he had done for the past twenty days, he once again began to view the monolith, sitting where he had always sat. That piece of limestone was already so clean that it seemed to glisten.

“Just what are you doing?” Tang Thirty-Six walked up in front of him and asked in surprise.

Zhexiu, Gou Hanshi and the others also walked over.

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng replied, “I feel that my method for comprehending the monoliths wasn’t correct, so I plan to try again.”

These words caused an uproar around the monolith hut.

They were all flabbergasted, shocked, perplexed, and at a loss.

Just what exactly did Chen Changsheng want to do?

Su Moyu asked, “Why?”

Chen Changsheng did not answer.

Guan Feibai said somewhat icily, “Just why?”

He still did not answer.

Gou Hanshi did not ask, because he had already vaguely understood.

From far away, Zhuang Huanyu jeered, “Show-off.”

Zhong Hui said nothing, but the Scholartree Manor scholar by his side mocked, “Just what are you playing at? Even if you are so amazing, is there any need to sit there and humiliate the rest of us?”

Chen Changsheng paid no attention to this talk. Addressing Tang Thirty-Six and the others, he said, “You guys will have to handle tonight’s dinner.”

It was just as the Divine Empress had said. Only Zhou Dufu had been able to truly understand the meaning of those monoliths after seeing them all within a day. Besides talent and perception, the most important trait was temperament. Zhou Dufu was domineering and arrogant. Even if Zhou Dufu had to tear open the sky to ask a question, so what? And how could Chen Changsheng ever have such boldness?

Yet what the Divine Empress did not know was that although Chen Changsheng's temperament was steady, he was most conscious of what his heart desired. If he desired to ask a question, then, while he would seem rather calm on the surface, he would actually be burning with an intensity just as fierce as Zhou Dufu's.

When the news that Chen Changsheng had once again sat down in front of the Reflecting Monolith reached the capital, many people were dumbfounded.

The Divine Empress was silent for a long time.

There were some people who wanted to see just what sort of trick Chen Changsheng was trying to pull, but they were turned away by Nian Guang, who would not allow any sort of disturbance.

Carrying a meal, Tang Thirty-Six came to deliver dinner.

Chen Changsheng continued to view the monolith.

He viewed the monolith under the starlight, its surface seemingly covered with snow.

He thought of a sentence in Xun Mei's notebook, then recalled the words Gou Hanshi had said upon entering the mausoleum.

The Heavenly Tome Monoliths were pieces of a world.

Since these Heavenly Tome Monoliths were all once one, then was it not correct by viewing each monolith on its own?

Was it correct instead to comprehend all seventeen monoliths together?

He calmly looked at the Reflecting Monolith, yet it also seemed like he was simultaneously looking at the Bent Osmanthus Monolith, the River Guiding Monolith...

The seventeen monoliths simultaneously appeared before his eyes.

Chapter 228 - [Thus We Shall Perceive Them](#) (Part Two)

Thousands of years ago, there was no such thing as the seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum. When they suddenly appeared, naturally there would be some sort of meaning behind it. What Chen Changsheng sought to do was to find this meaning. Of course he had already realized that this meaning most likely had to do with the missing Heavenly Tome Monolith. It had long since disappeared and he was incapable of finding it. Yet he knew that his process of deciphering the monoliths was not satisfactory. If he did not even attempt to find that missing portion, then the hole in his heart would never be filled. This was a situation that was unbearable to him.

Reflecting Monolith, Cloud Piercing Monolith, Bent Osmanthus Monolith, River Guiding Monolith, Fowl Language Monolith, East Pavilion Monolith... the seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum simultaneously appeared before his eyes.

In the center of his field of vision was the Reflecting Monolith, while the other sixteen monoliths orbited it as he attempted to piece them all together. It was just that those monolith inscriptions were too abstruse and complex. Those lines were too inexplicable and incomprehensible. Between lines, there was not a single natural connection, and between marks there was no intervening mark to be found. No matter how he combined, he could find no signs that these monolith inscriptions were originally one.

He even had a feeling that even if that broken monolith had been

restored and he had been able to read its inscription, he still would not be able to put the monolith inscriptions together.

For several hundreds of years, no one had been able to realize the profound mysteries of the seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum, or perhaps it had already shown that all his efforts were futile. He serenely sat outside the monolith hut. At some point, his eyes closed. The seventeen Heavenly Tome Monoliths swiftly moved through his sea of consciousness, combining in all sorts of ways. They did not pause, causing his spiritual sense to be consumed faster and faster, and his face became paler and paler.

Outside the Mausoleum of Books, the world was similarly quiet. Of the lights of the innumerable houses of the capital, more than half had been extinguished. Only the mansions of the aristocracy, as well as the two important places of the Imperial Palace and Li Palace, were still brightly lit. Chen Changsheng's determination to comprehend the monoliths of the front mausoleum again caused many people to be extremely shocked. It prompted ridicule, and it also made some people unable to sleep.

Time slowly but steadily passed. The vast sky of brilliant stars gradually grew dimmer. Once the darkness had passed, the light of dawn once again rose, brightening the earth. Unconsciously, Chen Changsheng had spent the entire night sitting in front of the monolith hut. There were many people within and outside the mausoleum that had also stayed there for the entire night waiting for him.

With the slight warmth of the morning light, the monolith viewers began to arrive from the mountain path one by one. When

they saw Chen Changsheng sitting inside, eyes closed, and not saying a word, each of their expressions were different. Perhaps it was admiration, perhaps it was ridicule, and some even had a sense of absolution that was hard to describe. Last night's circumstances were special, so Nian Guang was able to turn away all monolith viewers, but that could not be kept up forever, and thus the area around the forest gradually began to liven up.

Some people shook their heads at Chen Changsheng before proceeding to their own monoliths. Some people decided to purposely stay around the monolith hut just to see what Chen Changsheng would be able to comprehend. They took joy in his suffering as they thought back to how yesterday, Chen Changsheng had seen the entire front mausoleum and could clearly have departed with confidence. However, he had chosen to stay which was as if he had taken a rock and broken his own legs with it.

The people living in the grass hut also came over. Tang Thirty-Six carried a pot of porridge. It was clear this scion of Wenshui Tangs, born with a golden spoon in his mouth, had never done a day of housework in his life. He dripped porridge the entire way, even dropping quite a bit of it on to his shoes. He seemed somewhat battered and exhausted. Zhexiu brought along some side dishes and steamed buns, while Qi Jian carried bowls and chopsticks.

Chen Changsheng opened his eyes, took the bowl of porridge, and with a word of thanks to Qi Jian, he began to eat.

He ate two bowls of porridge, then ate a steamed bun

accompanied with some pickled tofu. At this point, he felt full enough, so he put his chopsticks down.

Tang Thirty-Six saw his clearly pale face and worriedly asked, “Won’t you eat some more, or how else will you keep pushing forward?”

Chen Changsheng replied, “Eating too much makes it easier to get sleepy.”

Tang Thirty-Six frowned. “Although I’m not clear just what the hell you’re trying to comprehend, since you insist on it, I know there’s no way to persuade you otherwise, but don’t tell me you really plan on doing this with no sleep?”

Off to the side, Gou Hanshi said nothing. He knew that the reason why Chen Changsheng was in a rush was because the day which the Garden of Zhou opened grew closer and closer.

Zhexiu offered a wet towel to Chen Changsheng.

The towel had been soaked in a creek, so it was very cold. Chen Changsheng forcefully rubbed it on his face and felt his energy restored somewhat. He told the group, “You guys don’t have to worry about me.”

Saying these words, he once again closed his eyes.

Although he had closed his eyes, Gou Hanshi and the others knew

that he was still viewing the monoliths. Perhaps this method did not hurt the eyes, but rather injured the spirit.

The morning birds flew out to welcome the rising sun, shaking the dew from their wings and feathers. Around the monolith hut, silence was restored. It seemed that all the people had already left.

Eyes closed and legs crossed, Chen Changsheng sat before the monolith hut and continued to attempt to comprehend the monoliths.

Time flowed by. Noiselessly, noon arrived, and then dusk, the twilight dense.

Today, the capital was as peaceful as the Mausoleum of Books. Within the Li Palace, the archbishops were in no mood to pay attention to the reports from their subordinates. In the Imperial Court, the chancellors had no mind to use on government affairs. The speed at which Mo Yu read through memorials had critically decreased. The Divine Empress brought the black goat on a slow stroll through the Palace of Great Brilliance, thinking about something or another. In one day, the Pope watered that Green Leaf seven times.

Those who did not know, who did not understand, viewed Chen Changsheng's actions as entertainment, or the topic of idle chatter.

Those who knew of how Zhou Dufu had comprehended the monoliths, who understood the inside story of the Mausoleum of Books, were anxiously waiting for something to happen, or not

happen.

Up until this point, that something had not occurred yet.

Within Chen Changsheng's field of vision, or perhaps his sea of consciousness, the seventeen Heavenly Tome Monoliths formed countless combinations and permutations. Although he had not exhausted all the possibilities, he had already exhausted an enormous amount of effort and consumed an innumerable amount of spirit. Regretfully, he had still not found what he was looking for. To him, the world was still missing something.

Suddenly, he had a flash of insight. He no longer attempted to assemble the seventeen monoliths together. To be precise, he no longer attempted to put the monoliths on the same plane together. Instead, he organized the seventeen monoliths into a straight line.

In front of him was the Reflecting Monolith, behind that was Cloud Piercing Monolith, and behind that was the Bent Osmanthus Monolith. In succession, he arranged them into a straight line.

Then he thought to himself, only the monolith inscriptions were needed.

Hence, the bodies of the seventeen monoliths disappeared, only leaving those inexplicably complex lines.

The seventeen layers of monolith inscriptions, from near to far, hovered before his eyes.

His vision could see through the monolith inscriptions of the Reflecting Monolith and see the inscriptions of the other sixteen monoliths behind it.

When these inscriptions were superimposed one in front of the other, they formed a brand new, never seen before, impossible to imagine design.

He looked at this design, and was astonished.

In the seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum, the farther back they were, the simpler and more orderly they seemed. The lines when superimposed seemed to become more orderly the farther back they were. Perhaps the thing that he wanted to find was concealed within?

However, the lines on the Reflecting Monolith were already exceedingly complicated. Although the lines on the monolith behind it were relatively simpler, they were still complex and incomprehensible, but if they were superimposed into a single design, their complexity was multiplied by several times. Relying on a human's mental strength alone, one would never be able to decipher it. Even if they only tried, they would still encounter problems.

Chen Changsheng only glanced at it, his spiritual sense barely stimulated, and he found it absolutely unbearable. His sea of consciousness shook in unrest and a sharp pain came from his stomach.

He spit out blood, wetting his shirt.

From the ever peaceful, seemingly deserted, surroundings of the monolith came a cry of alarm.

So as not to affect Chen Changsheng, those people had forced the volume of their cries down.

Chen Changsheng's eyes were still closed, so he was unable to take in the situation. In addition, his mind was fixed completely on that unfathomably complex design, so he did not notice their cries.

He only needed a glance to understand that the design could not be comprehended through human powers.

He inwardly said to himself: A little simpler.

These three words were not meant for that design, but for himself.

In the sea of consciousness of a cultivator, if one saw the world a certain way, the world would change to match what one imagined.

He forcefully curbed his spirit. Relying only on his mindset, which was calm beyond his years, as well as his spiritual sense whose suppleness even moved the Divine Empress, he once again looked upon the design.

He no longer attempted to arrange and calculate those lines, and just simply looked at it. In response, that design also became somewhat simpler.

Within that design, he saw countless scribblings of children, saw countless characters, saw countless songs and poems, saw countless ink paintings, saw the beautifully arranged and built buildings of the Li Palace, saw the Orthodox Academy's great banyan tree, saw the high mountains wreathed in clouds, and saw the three thousand classics of the Daoist Canon.

Everything that existed in this world also existed in that design.

However, it was still not enough. It was still too much, still too complex.

Chen Changsheng silently said to himself: Even simpler then.

He forgot the three thousand classics of the Daoist Canon, which he had studied since he was young, forgot the songs and poems that he had previously seen, forgot that he had once been to the Li Palace, forgot that he had once climbed that great banyan tree, and with Luo Luo by his side watched the sun set over the capital with satisfaction, forgot all the characters that he had learned. He forgot everything about everything.

This sort of forgetfulness was obviously not true forgetfulness; it was only a self-imposed isolation of the mind.

Only in this way would he be able to ask himself a single question.

If he was an illiterate child who saw the lines of this design, what would he think?

These were traces.

These were traces of flowing water.

These were the traces of clouds.

These were the traces left behind by a flock of geese as they flew through the blue sky.

Whatever walks must leave behind traces...no, that is something invented in essays and consolation when feeling sore.

When snow geese fly through the sky, not leaving behind a single trace. The lines of snow were really only an image to the eye.

Just what were these lines pointing at and indicating?

What the lines of snow were pointing at and indicating were the snow geese at the very front of the line.

What these lines pointed at and indicated was the end of the line.

If there is no end, then the line must have intersected somewhere.

Even simpler.

Chen Changsheng stared at the incomparably complex design, and repeated these words to himself.

Seventeen monoliths superimposed themselves before his eyes.

The bodies of the monoliths were the first to disappear.

Then the lines disappeared.

More and more lines continued to disappear before his eyes, slowly, ceaselessly disappearing.

More and more empty space, before his eyes, slowly, ceaselessly appeared.

The seventeen monoliths had completely disappeared. The lines on the monolith had also disappeared. A new design had been born.

It was a countless number of isolated points.

Chen Changsheng was sure that he had never seen this design before.

Yet for some reason, he felt that the design was very familiar.

(TL: The title of these two chapters, “Thus We Shall Perceive Them”, is from the last section of the Diamond Sutra. The section emphasizes that reality is an illusory and temporary construct and should be viewed as such.)

Chapter 229 - Seeing The Truth For The First Time

The seventeen monoliths turned into thousands upon thousands of lines, then into innumerable points. These points had no rhythm nor reason, like ink drizzled over a white sheet of paper. It was a design that no one could possibly have seen before. Then, how was it that it seemed so familiar? Chen Changsheng silently thought that the feeling that this design gave him was like something he had often seen, yet it was something that he had never closely examined. In the end, what exactly was it?

The monolith inscriptions had already been simplified into countless points. In his sea of consciousness, that invisible sheet of paper only contained countless points. No matter how he saw it, they were just points.

Points, points, points...the points of stars in the sky?

Even though he was still in self-observation, he seemingly felt that his lips were somewhat dry.

Because he was excited.

The design formed by the monoliths of the front mausoleum... could it perhaps be the starry sky?

In the next moment, he confronted his own speculation with intense doubt and suspicion. It was because the points that he saw

in front of him were too numerous, even more numerous than the stars in the night sky. If one said that the Heavenly Tome Monoliths of the front mausoleum had something to do with the starry sky, then on the contrary, one would also say that the starry sky was more monotonous than the design on the monoliths.

According to the most simplistic logic, there was no reason to use an even more complex design to portray an even simpler object. Even more importantly, if the Heavenly Tome Monoliths of the front mausoleum truly did portray the starry sky, then there was no further way to simplify it. Unless, these monoliths portrayed many pieces of the starry sky.

Yet, this world only had one starry sky.

Chen Changsheng pondered this in silence for a long time, then after pushing around an idea in his mind for a while, several lines slowly began to appear between the numerous points. If those lines were used to describe the movement of the points along their orbits, then, of those countless points on the design, some of the points were at different positions in time. Then all this could be easily resolved all at once.

Yes, it should be this way.

However, this forced him to face another problem. This problem was even harder to address. It could even cause the situation to become even more arduous.

Because the stars could not move.

The brightness of the stars could subtly change, but their positions in the night sky were eternal and unchanging. This was a truth that had been proved countless years ago. The star charts drafted by the countless star observatories of this continent did not have the slightest difference. The focus of their observations was completely concentrated on the brightness of these stars.

There had never been anyone who dared to question this standpoint, because this was a truth testified by countless people over a countless number of years. Just like how the sun would always set in the west. Just like how the moon was always in some faraway place that only demons could see. Just like how water would always flow to places of lower elevation. This was a truth that could never be overthrown.

When he was reading Wang Zhice's notebook in the Pavilion of Ascending Mist, that had been the reason why Chen Changsheng was uncomprehending and doubtful of the method of changing fate by changing the position of the stars. Even in that fantasy that he saw with his own eyes that Purple Abstruse Emperor Star subtly shifted the positions of the stars around it, he still did not believe it, because that was a fantasy, and not a truth seen with his own eyes.

It was just... Xun Mei's notebook had mentioned multiple times that to view the monoliths was to see the truth, but he had viewed the monoliths of the Mausoleum of Books for several decades and yet had never encountered the truth. In the end, in order to ascend to the summit of the mausoleum and see the truth, he paid his life as the price. Then, in end, what sort of truth did Chen Changsheng want to see? What was the truth? Was what he saw with his own

eyes the truth?

Chen Changsheng left his self-observation.

He opened his eyes and looked up at that monolith which truly existed.

It was late in the night, but there were still many people around the monolith hut. It was not what Chen Changsheng had thought. Tang Thirty-Six, Zhexiu, Gou Hanshi, and the rest had never left. They had remained to watch over Chen Changsheng as he attempted to comprehend the monoliths. From early morning to sunset, right up until the stars shone in the dark night sky.

At dusk, they had seen Chen Changsheng spit out blood and were very concerned.

Then they saw Chen Changsheng ball his hands into fists and arch his brows, as if he had realized something and became excited.

Now, they finally saw Chen Changsheng open his eyes and wake up.

Tang Thirty-Six stopped holding his breath and was prepared to walk forward, but then he stopped.

Because he realized that Chen Changsheng had not seen him.

Chen Changsheng was still staring at the monolith, still comprehending the monoliths. His mind was so devoted, that it moved their hearts and made them not want to disturb him.

Chen Changsheng had already viewed this monolith for twenty days.

In the morning light and the glow of the sunset. In the shower of rain and in the clear sky; he had viewed this monolith in all sorts of environments, and the changes in the monolith inscription were engraved in his heart.

He had also seen this monolith under the starlight, and he had not seen any place on it that stood out.

Tonight, the stars were as brilliant as ever, no different from any of the previous nights.

Yet, his eyes suddenly seemed to glow.

That light originated from a very thin and inconspicuous line in the lower left corner of the monolith.

There was nothing special about this line. It was just that its position and angle were just right so that the starlight coming down from the night sky would reflect off of it and into Chen Changsheng's eyes.

So his eyes glowed.

Twenty days of single-minded observation and contemplation had already drawn him very close to the truth. Tonight, this smattering of light finally allowed him to understand everything.

If the lines upon the monolith could reveal themselves and hide themselves with the natural light, then they could become countless characters and pictures. Then where did the brightness in the stars come from? It was because the stars moved. Only, if the stars could change position, how was it that no one had ever been able to see it?

The seventeen monoliths once again appeared before his eyes.

When those monolith inscriptions were superimposed over each other, the lines on the last monolith seemed to connect in many places with the lines from the first monolith.

At the very least they appeared to do so in his eyes.

In reality, there was still a large gap between those lines.

The reason why what he saw with his eyes was different from reality was because his line of sight was perpendicular to the surfaces of the monoliths.

The surfaces of the monoliths were the starry sky.

When people on the ground looked up at the starry sky, because the stars were simply too far away, one could believe that, when viewing the stars, one's sight was always perpendicular to the plane where the star resided. Then, if that star moved forward or backwards, those people would be incapable of seeing it because they stood on the ground. They could only see that the star had grown dimmer or brighter.

Yes, this was precisely why.

Chen Changsheng withdrew his vision from the monoliths. Only then did he realize that there were quite a lot of people around the monolith hut.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him in concern. "Nothing's wrong, right?"

Chen Changsheng said to him, "The positions are relative."

These were the first words that he had seen in Wang Zhice's notebook back at the Pavilion of Ascending Mist. It was only now that he understood their true meaning.

Tang Thirty-Six did not understand why he had so absent-mindedly said these words. He subconsciously responded, "And then?"

Chen Changsheng thought it over, then he pointed up to the sky

filled with stars. “Don’t you see? The stars can move.”

There was complete silence around the monolith, not a single voice could be heard. Everyone thought that Chen Changsheng had tried to comprehend the monoliths for too long and his spirit was exhausted to the extreme, so his mind was somewhat unclear. Yet for some reason, seeing his earnest appearance, they were struck with a sense of unease, as if something terrible were about to happen.

Ji Jin sternly scolded him, “What nonsense are you saying!”

“Yet, they really do move.”

Chen Changsheng calmly said, his tone and expression were incomparably confident.

Because this was the truth.

This really was the truth.

Chapter 230 - Tonight, The Stars Are Brilliant

The entire area around the monolith hut was in an uproar. Chen Changsheng's words challenged a truth that had never been questioned. The question was how was it that the stars could move? This was really too ridiculous. Not a single person believed it, and even Gou Hanshi could only arch his brows. The sense of unease in the people's hearts disappeared without a trace, replaced with ridicule.

Chen Changsheng was not surprised by their reactions. He knew that he was definitely not the first one to realize that the stars could move. At the very least, Wang Zhice had shown in his notebook that he had long begun to think in that direction. Then, why did the Daoist Canon have nothing on this matter? That was because this sort of matter was impossible to prove. When cultivators determined their Fated Star, everything that they saw was with their spiritual sense and could not be taken as proof. It was only evidence if they could fly up to that unfathomably distant starry sky and transmit everything they saw to the people down below.

Chen Changsheng had no means to prove that the stars could move, and so to say that he had "realized" it would not be right. Rather, this was only the speculation that had arisen from his viewing of the seventeen Heavenly Tome Monoliths of the front mausoleum. It could also be considered as the enlightenment he had obtained from comprehending the monoliths—It was impossible to convince people with speculation, but it was enough to convince himself. This was because it was in line with his idea of beauty, as well as the fundamental way in which he viewed the

world.

At least for now, it was enough for only him to believe that the stars could move. As for whether people could believe it or not, he did not care.

He lifted his head towards the brilliant stars in the sky and said nothing more.

The stars in the night seemed to be eternally unmoving, but in reality they were in constant motion, sometimes forwards and sometimes backwards. From time to time, the distance between the stars and earth would grow larger, and from time to time it would grow smaller. The distance and angle between the stars was constantly changing. It was just that the starry sky was simply too far away from the observers on the ground. It was too difficult to perceive the subtle changes in angle from where they stood.

If the seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum portrayed the positions of the countless stars, as well as the orbits they traveled upon, then how could this picture be compared to the true starry sky?

He lowered his head and closed his eyes, once again entering his sea of consciousness to observe the monolith inscriptions.

The seventeen monoliths arranged themselves into a straight line before his eyes once more. The monolith inscriptions were superimposed upon each other in the air, and then the countless intersecting lines became countless points. He used his

consciousness to have the image disassemble then reform itself. Gradually, those points began to move along those lines, slowly and smoothly, adhering to some indescribable law.

The image was a star chart. Countless star charts, each from a different time, one after another flitted before his eyes.

The endless variations of the stars, with time as their axis, ceaselessly moved before Chen Changsheng's eyes.

The stars moved through the night, and the traces that they left were chiseled into the monoliths, which eventually became the monolith inscriptions of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths of the front mausoleum.

From the ground, even though the stars moved back and forth, they always remained in fixed positions. As a result, this ever-changing star chart necessarily could only be obtained by observing them from some other angle.

Time passed slowly, but in reality, an innumerable number of years had passed, upon which he finally arrived at the final star chart.

Logically, this star chart should have portrayed the current position of the stars in the true sky.

Yet, for some reason, the stars on the star chart occupied a completely different position from the real stars in the sky—In

the final moment, if the result and the expected outcome were different, many people would receive a massive shock, even so much so that they would begin to doubt their premise; however, once Chen Changsheng's heart was set, it would not waver.

He looked at the final star chart, then after a long period of silence, lifted his right hand and began to gently pull at the edges of the star chart.

The star chart was a reflection of the truth, so obviously it could not be a plane, but rather it was a cube.

Along with the gentle pull of his fingers, the side of the star chart noiselessly and slowly began to revolve, its side facing the front.

This was yet another new design. On it were still countless stars, yet they seemed much more solemn and constant.

Chen Changsheng opened his eyes and once again looked up at the night sky.

Over there was a brilliantly starry sky.

When the new star chart in his sea of consciousness was placed over the real starry sky, there was a region in the southeast corner that was a perfect fit.

There was not a single star out of place. Every star on that star chart found its matching counterpart in the sky.

This sort of feeling was very beautiful, and very shocking.

For a long time, Chen Changsheng found himself speechless.

Then he thought of even more things.

In Wang Zhice's notebook, he had brought up a question about this starry sky.

In the long stream of history, countless worthy predecessors had brought up similar questions.

If the fate of man was truly hidden within this same starry sky, and the stars were eternally unmoving, then it was naturally impossible to change their fate. Then in the end, why did man struggle and strive?

To the understanding of humanity, the starry sky was always that solemn and serene, always that perfect. It was like the Heavenly Dao or fate, set up on high, unable to be glimpsed at.

Tonight, Chen Changsheng understood that to be solemn did not mean it was rigid. True perfection did not mean being eternally unchanging.

As the stars could move, their positions could also change. The distance and angle of one's fated star with other stars were

naturally also changing.

If those connections were the traces of fate, then was that not essentially saying that fate could be changed?

On the back of his notebook, Wang Zhice had written these words so forcefully that he penetrated through the page: There is no such thing as fate.

Yes, there simply was no such thing as a fixed fate.

With a huge bang, it rumbled through Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness.

He had deciphered the thing which had plagued him for so many years, the hardest thing to dispel on the spiritual level for him.

He had deciphered his own personal Heavenly Tome Monolith

The spiritual strength that he had obtained from comprehending the seventeen Heavenly Tome Monoliths began to affect the actual world.

In the distant night sky, the specks of starlight were intimately connected.

Within his sea of consciousness, on the star chart made up of monolith inscriptions, all the points began to light up and glow.

Almost at the same time, the stars above the Mausoleum of Books also seemed to grow several times brighter.

In the even more remote depths of the sea of stars, where perhaps even the powerful spiritual sense of a Saint would be unable to perceive, a red star began to exude a boundless radiance.

This was the true radiance of a star, a radiance that human eyes were incapable of seeing. A strand of this starlight fell upon the Mausoleum of Books.

The people around the monolith hut were all stunned, not knowing what had just happened.

In the next moment, they were all shocked beyond compare as they realized that Chen Changsheng had disappeared from his place in front of the monolith hut.

Like a cool breeze, like a strand of starlight, without a noise, coming and going unhindered.

Chen Changsheng had vanished from the Reflecting Monolith. Momentarily, he appeared before the Cloud Piercing Monolith.

He paused at the Cloud Piercing Monolith for only an instant before his body once again disappeared, appearing before the Bent Osmanthus Monolith.

Soon after, he appeared at the River Guiding Monolith, then the Fowl Language Monolith, and then the East Pavilion Monolith.

For only an instant, he appeared before each of the monoliths of the front mausoleum, then vanished just as quickly, finally arriving before that broken monolith.

His eyes were still shut, oblivious to everything. He simply did not know what was happening.

Tonight, a strange phenomena occurred in the sky.

To the naked eye, it seemed that the many stars in the sky did not get any brighter, but many people knew otherwise. A little later, even the common people were able to realize this amazing fact.

If one star got a little brighter, it would be very hard to tell, but if all the tens of thousands of stars of the entire southeast region simultaneously became slightly brighter, what sort of scene would that produce?

The starlight illuminated the Mausoleum of Books, and it also illuminated the entire capital.

The streets and alleys in the late night seemed to return to daytime.

The Dew Platform was closest to the night sky, so every detail of it was brightly illuminated. The night pearls at the edge of the

platform seemed dim compared to the illuminating starlight.

The Divine Empress stood at the edge of the platform, looking out into the boundless sea of stars. Her expression was somewhat surprised, even dignified.

She did not think that, with his temperament, Chen Changsheng would sit before the monolith hut to comprehend the monoliths once more. She did not think that Chen Changsheng would actually be able to be like that man, deciphering the entire front mausoleum and attracting countless rays of starlight. She still did not believe that Chen Changsheng would be able to do what that man had done so many years ago.

As the present was no longer those days of the past, the Mausoleum of Book was no longer the same mausoleum that it had been in the past.

The starlight spilled through the window and onto the table, causing the memorials that were faintly yellow from the candle light to be bathed in white. The words upon the memorial also became much more distinct.

Mo Yu raised her eyebrows and looked out the window. In surprise she thought, perhaps he really comprehended those Heavenly Tome Monoliths?

South of the city in Bitter Rain Alley, there was a government office. This government office seemed very plain, but in the eyes of the people, it was especially sinister, because this was the office of

the Zhou Dynasty's Ministry of Personnel.

Tonight, the sinister atmosphere of this office was somewhat dispersed by the purifying starlight.

Zhou Tong walked into the courtyard, using his hand to bring the veil of his hat down, so as to block out the radiance of the starlight. He slightly frowned, somewhat displeased.

The words Prince Chen Liu had said to Tianhai Shengxue were incorrect. He had not been waiting outside the mausoleum for Chen Changsheng.

Even if Chen Changsheng had obtained the first rank of the First Banner during the Grand Examination, in Zhou Tong's eyes, he was still an unremarkable nobody.

Yet now, as he looked up at the night sky filled with brilliant starlight, he finally began to think differently.

In other words, this sky full of starlight left him with no other choice but to put this youth in his focus.

Since the starlight filled the human world, illuminating houses and courtyards alike, it naturally would also illuminate that well near the New North Bridge.

In the past two days, the dirt at the bottom of the well had been freshly dug up. A strand of miserable yet obstinate starlight

penetrated into the gloomy world.

The starlight illuminated that red mole on the small girl's face, yet it was incapable of dispelling the coldness about her.

Luoluo stood beside the railing of the top floor of the Education Palace's hall, when suddenly she looked up at the sky.

The night here was fake, the stars eternally unmoving, and yet they had no vitality.

She felt something, that Chen Changsheng was, at the moment, doing something extraordinary.

She turned to Jin Yulu and said, "I want to go out."

After a moment of silence, Jin Yulu replied, "Your Highness cannot help him."

"Teacher does not need my help." Luo Luo confidently said, "I want to go to the Orthodox Academy to wait for him and congratulate him."

The starlight illuminated the Mausoleum of Books, and it also illuminated the capital.

The Li Palace basked in the pure and holy starlight.

Several thousand priests and students from various academies came out to the plaza and the Divine Avenue. They ceaselessly prayed to the stars in the sky with expressions of absolute piety.

In the deepest depths of that hall.

The Pope looked as the starlight that leaked through the cracks of the roof and fell upon the Green Leaf, and on his aged face appeared a loving smile.

Mei Lisha looked outside the hall to view that snow-like starlight, and said with deep emotion, “It’s just like that day.”

The Pope knew that he was speaking of that day that Wang Zhice comprehended the Dao and broke through. On that night, the entire capital had also been bathed in light.

Tonight, the image from that day once again appeared.

This sort of image had not been seen for several hundred years.

Mei Lisha suddenly creased his brow and questioned, “Is this Star Condensation?”

The Pope replied, “No, he is still at Ethereal Opening.”

Mei Lisha asked, “Then why are the stars so bright?”

The Pope thought it over, then said with some hesitation, “Perhaps, he used a Star Condensation method to continue on Ethereal Opening?”

Chapter 231 - The Enigmatic Black Stone, The Perfect Starry Sky

Even a Saint like the Pope was unsure of Chen Changsheng's current situation. This was due to the fact that from the very beginning, Chen Changsheng's method of cultivation was different from everyone else's. He had walked a path that no one else had ever walked before. He had already dispelled what many cultivators considered to be common knowledge or even rules. There were so many bizarre things on his path that would be hard to believe.

Before he had even undergone purification, he had already begun doing meditative introspection, thus having a close encounter with death and almost returning to the stars. However, he received the assistance of the Black Dragon and was able to survive that harrowing encounter. Later, in the Grand Examination, he once again found himself in dire straits, but amidst the autumn rain, he was able to break through into Ethereal Opening. He had originally thought that he was still taking in starlight for purification, but in reality, he had always been at opening his Ethereal Palace.

From beginning to end, he had always used methods that exceeded his own level of cultivation.

It was just like an infant that had not learned how to walk, yet was already trying to run, or who did not have the teeth to learn words, but had already began to memorize the Daoist Canon. Or perhaps it was like someone who did not have the strength to lift a sword, but was already attempting to learn how to fight. These were all extremely dangerous things, and so were all the things

that Chen Changsheng had attempted. If he did not have such fortuitous encounters, he would have died long ago.

Starlight rained down upon the Mausoleum of Books, illuminating that meadow into a snow-white cloth. Chen Changsheng sat in front of that broken monolith, his eyes tightly closed. His sea of consciousness and the starry sky above both shone as the universe harmonized with his body. The countless stars in the night sky gazed down on him. They watched over him as he who was still at Ethereal Opening began to undergo Star Condensation ahead of time.

The Qi emanating from his body continued to rise, continuing to stretch out in all directions. Like the sharp sword-like edges of that monolith, this Qi cut towards the heavens. The invisible radiance of the stars accompanied the starlight and fell upon the roof of that hut, falling upon the monolith, and falling onto his body. It flooded into his body without end, bringing with it the slight chill of the night wind.

If he could break through this mountain pass, then his future prospects would be limitless.

Accompanied by the chilly night wind, many people arrived outside the Mausoleum of Books.

The Six Prefects of the Orthodoxy had come with Mei Lisha standing at the lead.

The head of the Tianhai Clan had also come.

Jin Yulu had come

Mao Qiuyu had come.

Mo Yu had also come.

They did not enter the mausoleum. Relying on their powerful spiritual senses, they silently observed the event which occurred in front of the broken monolith.

The distance left before Chen Changsheng broke through that mountain pass was not too far.

However, nobody knew if he would really succeed in breaking through, and if he did break through, to what degree he would succeed.

Within his body, the gate of his Ethereal Palace had already begun to slowly open. The clear waters that wrapped around his Spirit Mountain were, at the moment, ceaselessly flowing, with it flowing faster and faster. As the water became faster, it created many whirlpools, which caused the dead leaves littering the mountain path to float into the air, beating against the stone steps before the gate. Although all this had been done without a sound, in truth it shook one to the core.

The Ethereal Palace sat in the center of the Spirit Mountain, while the Spirit Mountain sat within the waters of the lake, which

were at the very moment, being transformed by the radiance of the stars.

The radiance that entered his body continued to increase and the lake grew increasingly restless, almost as if it was about to turn into a vast ocean.

At any time, the dam could burst, even though this floating lake had no dam.

In time with the fluctuations of the lake, countless rays of light were refracted and reflected back and forth under the surface of the water. The rays of light gradually became purer and concentrated, eventually gathering together and becoming sparkling points of light, almost like stars.

The vast sky of stars of the night appeared in Chen Changsheng's mind, which then appeared within this lake. Every star's position was precisely where it should have been.

It was just that this starry sky gave a sense of incompleteness, that somewhere, there was something missing.

This piece of the starry sky made up the seventeen Heavenly Tome Monoliths of the front mausoleum.

However, the front mausoleum formerly had eighteen monoliths.

The last monolith had been broken, so naturally its monolith inscriptions no longer existed.

Chen Changsheng had not seen those monolith inscriptions, so naturally the star chart in his spirit would still be missing that piece.

If that gap in the starry sky was never filled in, then everything would stop.

In the plaza of the Li Palace, the Pope gazed towards the Mausoleum of Books, raising his hand to block out the night and the starlight. After a moment of silence, he said, "It would be better if only that monolith were still there."

On the Dew Platform, the Divine Empress looked into the night. With an apathetic expression, she thought to herself, missing that monolith, how could today's mausoleum still be the same Mausoleum of Books from the past?

Many years ago, Zhou Dufu viewed all eighteen monoliths in one day. Then for a reason, the reason for not wanting others to be like him, he took away a monolith.

From that day on, people began to speak of the seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum.

After many years, Chen Changsheng was the closest to comprehending the full meaning of the monoliths of the front

mausoleum.

The problem lay in the fact that he had no means of viewing that broken monolith. As a result, it was very likely that he would only be this close to the truth forever, never able to touch upon it.

Seeing the starry sky slowly taking shape in the lake, Chen Changsheng instinctively sensed that this starry sky was still incomplete.

He knew that what he was missing was the monolith inscriptions on the broken monolith.

He silently pondered this, unable to find a solution. He went on a mental journey of ten thousand miles, but found no monolith.

Gradually, his spirit became increasingly disordered, even somewhat muddleheaded.

Just then, the dagger at his waist began to fiercely tremble.

A black stone appeared amidst the wasteland.

This wasteland was covered in a blanket of snow. This snow was the true radiance of the stars.

Chen Changsheng was oblivious to everything. He did not know what was going on in the outside world, nor did he know about the

changes inside his own body.

That clear lake, suspended in the sky, absorbed and condensed countless rays of light, which became incomparably translucent.

If one looked at the lake from above, it would seem just like a massive glass pearl.

The curved surface of the water was so smooth, that it could magnify the scenery.

Under the lake, the black stone was magnified to an incredible size.

In the Pavilion of Ascending Mist, when Chen Changsheng had touched the black stone, he had an out-of-body experience. He knew that the black stone was certainly no ordinary object. It could even be the key to defying the heavens and changing fate. He had even given it a close examination, yet in the end he could not find anything special about it.

That black stone was small enough to be held in his hand. It was gentle and smooth, its surface not having the slightest crack.

If he were to open his eyes now, he would certainly be extremely shocked.

Only when the black stone was magnified many times would one be able to see that the surface of the black stone was covered with

countless extremely thin lines.

Those lines were extraordinarily complex, like the traces left behind by water. They had no pattern and they absolutely could not have been artificially carved into its surface.

If one examined it closely, one would perhaps feel that those lines were similar to the inscriptions on the Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

The black stone suddenly began to glow, just like it had back in the Pavilion of Ascending Mist.

The fine lines on the surface of the black stone also began to glow.

The lines projected onto the lake became glowing rays of light.

Then those rays of light acted just like the other monolith inscriptions, unceasingly condensing and turning into countless points of light.

Every point of light was a star. Countless points of light converging in one area was a small portion of the starry sky.

The incomplete starry sky in this way was completed in such a way.

There was a hum.

Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness quaked.

The countless stars within the lake simultaneously flared with light, consolidating into an extremely thick pillar of light which landed on the gate to his Ethereal Palace in the end.

Nearly a month ago, back in the Tower of Purging Dust, the gate to his Ethereal Palace had been opened halfway. Tonight, this pillar of light, made from the radiance of the stars, finally smashed that gate completely open.

Chapter 232 - The Grand Display Of Fireworks Makes A Nightless Day

The starlight that covered the Mausoleum of Books, shining in sync with the starlight that rushed into his Ethereal Palace. The starlight was like snow, blanketing both Chen Changsheng and the broken monolith. His spiritual sense was carried along with the wind and snow, being taken off to some place unknown. The starlight also fell on other places, such as the Reflecting Monolith. The lines on the monolith became increasingly brighter and they would occasionally sparkle. It was just like as if mercury was flowing through those lines.

Although he could not see the Reflecting Monolith, he could see the inscriptions on it. He was insensible to the world, but his true essence flowed like the mercury-like starlight that flowed through the monolith inscriptions. The true essence began to flow through his meridians, allowing those once parched rivers and streams to flourish with life once more. Ultimately, those clear waters poured off the steep cliffs into the abyss below. It seemed identical to what had happened in the past, but now, there seemed to be a faint glimmer of hope.

Even if the abyss was even deeper, as long as the water flowed without end, presumably, there would be a day in which it was filled, right?

The starlight also fell upon the second Heavenly Tome Monolith. The lines on the monolith seemed to fluctuate between bright and dim, like the spiritual sense was floating in the void, its position was unfathomable. Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense shifted,

moving off to some distant riverbank, then suddenly arrived in front of the River Guiding Monolith. In the midst of his sojourn, an indescribable rule had been branded onto his soul.

The starlight fell on each of the seventeen Heavenly Tome Monoliths of the front mausoleum. Like falling snow and like drifting leaves, the countless methods for comprehending the monoliths thought by his worthy predecessors appeared in his sea of consciousness, one after the other, and in his body, they began to display their purposes. His meridians became saturated with true essence like never before, his spiritual sense was nourished like never before, and his Qi constantly increased in power.

Time slowly passed. He sat in front of the broken monolith with eyes closed, waiting for that moment to come.

The starlight continued to illuminate the capital, and the Dew Platform continued to blaze, except the light it gave off were cold like flames made of ice.

The Divine Empress stood in the middle of the indescribably beautiful flames of ice, looking at the Mausoleum of Books in silence. That monolith had vanished from the Mausoleum of Books long ago, so how did Chen Changsheng complete the starry sky?

The Mausoleum of Books was enveloped in that snow-like starlight. There was silence all around the monolith hut. As Gou Hanshi, Zhuang Huanyu, Tang Thirty-Six, and the other young monolith viewers saw the mercury-like starlight flow through the lines on that monolith, they each had their own expression. Although they could never know for sure what had happened here

tonight, they knew that it definitely had something to do with Chen Changsheng.

Gou Hanshi suddenly lifted his head to look at the star-filled region in the southeast part of the sky, then he began walking towards the monolith hut. Zhexiu followed him. Then Tang Thirty-Six, Qi Jian, and the rest followed without hesitation. They all entered the hut, then they disappeared, going towards their respective monoliths.

They did not know why tonight, the Mausoleum of Books was illuminated to be as bright as day. However, they knew that many years ago, when Wang Zhice had broken through, the capital had experienced a similar strange phenomena.

They could clearly sense that the starlight tonight was much richer than on normal days. Even their own Fated Stars were much brighter than usual, like they were waiting for them. To cultivators, how could they pass on such an opportunity? Especially since after twenty odd days, the vast majority of them were on the verge of breaking through. They had to take advantage of every chance and opportunity.

Not long after Gou Hanshi and the others had entered the monolith hut and disappeared from the Reflecting Monolith, a clear and long cry suddenly arose from within the mountain mausoleum.

This clear cry came from the East Pavilion Monolith.

The Divine State's Third Law, Liang Xiaoxiao, stood in front of the monolith hut, his expression has an icy arrogance as ever, only his trembling right hand betrayed his excitement. After he had broken through all those months ago, his cultivation had become stuck in a rut. Even his viewing of the monoliths had ceased to progress. Yet tonight, borrowing this starlight, he had broken through to the middle level of Ethereal Opening in one stroke.

In front of another monolith hut.

Tang Thirty-Six took the medicine box that Chen Changsheng had given him several days ago out of his bosom. He took some pills from the box and he offered them to Zhexiu. Then, he swallowed down the rest of the pills and closed his eyes.

Zhexiu shot him a glance, and then in the same way, he swallowed the pills.

Glancing at Guan Feibai and Liang Banhu, Gou Hanshi distributed the medicines prepared by the Mount Li Sword Sect, then without any further delay, he moved on to the next monolith hut. Only after he delivered the rest of the pills to Qi Jian would he slowly take his leave.

This was the third Heavenly Tome Monolith, Bent Osmanthus Monolith.

It was spring, so there were no osmanthus flowers blooming on the mountain. There were no golden petals, nor was there any of that sweet cloying fragrance of osmanthus flowers most detested

by Tang Thirty-Six.

And yet for some reason, around the Bent Osmanthus Monolith, an intense fragrance suddenly appeared.

Perhaps it was because all those shockingly talented youth were using their true essence to digest the pills, thus releasing this fragrance.

Pop, pop, pop, pop.

A fine, yet extremely disturbing breaking sound arose from Zhexiu's body.

It seemed like the sound of all of his bones being broken.

Soon after, the sound of boiling water arose from his body.

Following this, more and more sounds of boiling water began to arise from all around the monolith. The cross-legged youths, eyes shut, slowly began to be wrapped in a white mist as they broke through.

The boiling was the sound of the radiance of the stars igniting into true essence, the sound of the gate of the Ethereal Palace in the Spirit Mountain slowly being pushed open.

After an unknown amount of time, Tang Thirty-Six opened his

eyes.

The joking expression that was usually seen in his eyes long ago had disappeared, it was replaced with solemnity, peace and an incomparable serenity.

In the deepest depths of his black pupils, there still seemed to be the afterglow from the radiance of the stars.

This was proof that his Ethereal Palace had been opened.

Tang Thirty-Six had entered Ethereal Opening.

Guan Feibai opened his eyes next. He spat out a mouthful of impure Qi, and a hot vapor rising from the corner of his lips.

Liang Banhu opened his eyes, then he looked around with a look of naïve joy. He seemed extremely peaceful and happy.

The two disciple from Mount Li Sword Sect had entered Ethereal Opening.

Next, Su Moyu had entered Ethereal Opening.

The senior sister from Holy Maiden Peak entered Ethereal Opening.

The students from Star Seizer Academy entered Ethereal Opening.

The two scholars from Scholartree Manor entered Ethereal Opening.

Around the Bent Osmanthus Monolith, people successively entered Ethereal Opening.

In front of the River Guiding Monolith, Qi Jian entered Ethereal Opening.

In the front mausoleum, every person had entered Ethereal Opening.

Like snow, the starlight fell over the Mausoleum of Books.

When some people broke into Ethereal Opening, the Qi around the monolith hut became disturbed. This caused the starlight snow falling down to bend and scatter, like flowers blooming. It was particularly beautiful.

Tang Thirty-Six stood in front of the Bent Osmanthus Monolith, lightly rubbing his fingers and taking in that sweet and cloying fragrance. Suddenly, he realized that the osmanthus flowers were not so unbearable after all.

The starlight fell on his body, then like water, it sputtered apart and scattered back into the night sky.

Not too far off, where Liang Banhu and Guan Feibai stood, starlight was also sputtering apart and then scattering back into the night sky.

Outside the Bent Osmanthus Monolith, ten odd rays of starlight sputtered into the night, there were figures of people standing in them.

An identical scene was occurring in many places in the front mausoleum.

The luxuriant forests of the Mausoleum of Books, even when enveloped in starlight, were still somewhat gloomy.

Suddenly, from the mountain rose dozens of strands of sputtering starlight, blooming into silver flowers. A more beautiful sight could not be imagined.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at Zhexiu.

Under the snow white starlight, Zhexiu's face was all the paler. An incidental flush of red was a sign of the Tide Rush of Blood.

His true essence had been brought under control by Chen Changsheng's copper needles. Before when he had taken those pills, it was exceptionally dangerous.

This was also the principal reason why compared to the other monolith viewers, he had not yet been able to enter Ethereal Opening.

The other was naturally his demi-human blood.

Suddenly, the only sound that could be heard around the monolith hut was that of a mournful wind.

On the roof of the hut appeared many deep knife cuts.

Extremely sharp claws extended from Zhexiu's fingers, suffused with a metallic luster.

His face grew many gray hairs and his eyes turn red. He gave a bloodthirsty feeling.

Suddenly, a powerful Qi emanated from his body.

He lifted his head and howled into the night.

Arooooo!

This howl was filled with unwillingness and anger, it was also filled with contempt and pride.

This howl was directed to the vast sky of stars, but it was even

more directed to that luminous ball at the extreme ends of the north. It said: I have won.

Within the Mausoleum of Books, the starlight fell upon the bodies of those youth breaking into Ethereal Opening, then it sputtered back up into the night air. It was just like a display of fireworks, truly beautiful.

If one looked at it from outside the mausoleum, one would think the entire Mausoleum of Books was releasing fireworks.

While the scene was beautiful, it was also incredibly shocking.

In the Mausoleum of Books, in front of the Divine Path, sat a pavilion.

All around this pavilion were shallow canals. Within those canals flowed clear water.

Tonight, the clear waters of the canal had been covered with a thin layer of frost and then it was illuminated by the countless fireworks rising from the mausoleum.

Under the pavilion, that dust-covered suit of armor was also illuminated by those fireworks.

The rust-covered helmet flashed with light.

The man in the armor had woken up.

An extremely transformative voice flowed out of the helmet, his tone somewhat oppressive.

“As expected, the season of blossoming flowers has finally come.”

As the continent’s number one Divine General, this old man had left the frontlines of the war with the demons and guarded the Mausoleum for several hundred years. What he guarded was humanity’s future. As he saw tonight’s display of fireworks over the Mausoleum of Books, he was naturally gratified. In his heart, he silently thanked two people. One these people was called Xun Mei. The other was called Chen Changsheng.

Those powerful figures outside the mausoleum had come to see Chen Changsheng. They had simply not imagined that they would able to see such a shocking spectacle.

In one night, dozens of monolith viewers collectively entered into Ethereal Opening.

In all of humanity’s history, this sort of scene had never been seen before.

The gardens outside the mausoleum were silent, punctuated by the occasional deep sigh.

The fireworks gradually died down, the radiance of the stars

dimmed, and the Mausoleum of Books returned to normal.

The powerful figures of the Orthodoxy, the Imperial Court, and the various sects and academies made an exception and they entered the Mausoleum of Books to wait at the foot of the mountain.

Tonight, the young cultivators that had broken through were too many. Some had entered Ethereal Opening, others had entered the middle level of Ethereal Opening, and there were still others that succeeded in entering Star Condensation! To humanity, this was undoubtedly a fruitful night. It was absolutely necessary that they handle the following matters personally. Not a single problem could be allowed to arise.

Chen Changsheng woke up and realized that he was sitting cross-legged in front of the broken monolith. He took a look at the color of the sky and he confirmed that it was five in the morning.

It was the time right before dawn.

He stood up and walked through the meadow to the edge of the cliff.

The waterfall under the cliff still made its soul-shaking sounds.

He did not sweat, he did not feel exhausted nor did he ache anywhere. It was like nothing had happened.

However, he knew that many things had already happened.

It was darkest before dawn. The starlight was insufficient to illuminate the distant capital.

Yet in his eyes, his view of the capital was crystal clear. It was like every street and alley, even the great banyan tree in the courtyard of the Orthodox Academy, was right in front of his eyes.

The dawn light gradually drew closer. Line by line, the stars in the sky gradually vanished.

But he knew that those stars all still hung up above his head.

He could clearly sense his Fated Star.

This was the first time that he was able to sense his Fated Star in the daytime.

The morning sun appeared over the horizon.

The warm and red rays of light caressed his face.

He did not know why.

He could not explain why.

He was completely unaware of the magnificent spectacle that had occurred in the Mausoleum of Books last night.

He was unaware that he had become the youngest cultivator in history to reach the upper level of Ethereal Opening.

Yet, he felt deeply moved.

Chapter 233 - Leaving The Mausoleum

Facing the red morning sun, Chen Changsheng spread out his hands and did something contrary to every law of cultivation. Later on, he would also wonder why he had done such a thing. It was just like how he had, for no reason whatsoever, become deeply moved. He wanted to do it, so he did it... He spread his hands out, turned to the sky that was just changing from a dull gray to a dark blue, found his Fated Star, and began to absorb the starlight.

This was the first time that he had ever attempted to absorb starlight for purification in the daytime.

This was also perhaps the first time in countless years where a normal cultivator attempted to absorb starlight for purification in the daytime.

Perhaps because he was lucky, he did not die, nor was he burnt to ash. On the contrary, he was able to clearly sense that the gate to his Ethereal Palace had been completely opened, so the speed at which he absorbed starlight was increased by several hundred times.

Of course, his meridians were still broken in many places. His seven most important meridians, especially, were still broken. That bottomless abyss still existed, but amongst those meridians which had been broken into countless pieces, especially those around the inner organs around his Ethereal Palace, the true essence that had been converted from the radiance of the stars were extremely plentiful, such that it seemed like the wounds inflicted upon his meridians had been somewhat healed.

Could this be one of mystical properties of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths? He turned and looked at the broken monolith as he ruminated in silence.

As he was standing on the cliff edge, he was somewhat far from the broken monolith and he could not see it clearly. And yet, he felt that he could see the missing monolith, and that it was not because his eyes were playing tricks on him.

Up to now, Chen Changsheng had truly comprehended the meaning of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths of the front mausoleum. He had accomplished the same feat that Zhou Dufu had accomplished all those years ago.

If he were to continue forward, he would most likely enter another mausoleum mountain and see Heavenly Tome Monoliths that were even more mystical. However, he glanced at the color of the sky and chose not to continue. In this way, he departed.

In the early morning, the Mausoleum of Books was very peaceful. The previous night's display of fireworks had finished long ago. There were no people in front of any of the seventeen monoliths. The mountain path was also devoid of people.

Many people were deep asleep and they had yet to wake up. Perhaps they would stay asleep for many days ahead.

Breaking into a new realm was never a simple venture. Not everyone could be like Chen Changsheng and to seemingly so

casually stride across that threshold, without even feeling a hint of exhaustion. Of course, to some people, breaking through was not a very arduous affair. An example of this was Gou Hanshi.

Gou Hanshi stood at the end of the mountain path, calmly waiting for him.

Chen Changsheng walked up to him, clasped his hands in greeting, and then he saw the faint luster in Gou Hanshi's eyes. He knew that Gou Hanshi's cultivation had also improved.

From the Ivy Festival to the Grand Examination to the Mausoleum of Books, the pair's level of cultivations was finally identical. They were both at the upper level of Ethereal Opening.

Chen Changsheng bid farewell to him. "I'm going now."

Gou Hanshi replied, "There are still several days until the Garden of Zhou opens. There should still be enough time."

"There are still some matters I have to take care of in the capital."

Gou Hanshi was silent for a while, then he said, "I am not planning on going to the Garden of Zhou. Take care of yourself on the journey."

"Why are you planning on staying here?" Chen Changsheng asked with some bewilderment.

“At the very least, I have to finish seeing all seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum.” Gou Hanshi smiled as he replied.

Chen Changsheng said sincerely, “I wish you the best.”

Gou Hanshi looked at him and said, “All of this year’s Grand Examination examinees should be thanking you.”

Chen Changsheng did not understand, so Gou Hanshi explained everything that had happened last night.

After a period of thought, he replied, “There’s no need to thank me. I only did what I wanted to do.”

Gou Hanshi knew that he was not being modest, because Chen Changsheng was only thinking about his comprehension of the monoliths. As for the starlight that had illuminated the capital and the mausoleum, that was not something that he had willed.

Side by side, the two youths walked back to the grass hut.

Walking past the fence that had just been fixed not two days ago, Chen Changsheng entered the hut and he began to pack his things up. Seeing Tang Thirty-Six with his thunderous snores, Chen Changsheng shook his head. Yet, when he realized that Zhexiu was not there, he could not help but feel a bit down.

Carrying his luggage out, he said to Gou Hanshi, “I trouble you to take care of Tang Tang for me.”

Gou Hanshi said, “That’s no problem. But just to be clear, outside the mausoleum, we are still rivals.”

Chen Changsheng said, “Understood.”

Gou Hanshi added, “Third junior brother and youngest junior brother are also going to the Garden of Zhou. Once inside, I would like you to look after them for me.”

Chen Changsheng asked in confusion. “You just said that we were rivals.”

“Being rivals doesn’t mean we can’t mutually support each other.”

Chen Changsheng thought it over, then said, “That’s reasonable... though I don’t think I have the ability to look after those two.”

Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian were ranked amongst the Divine State’s Seven Laws, the most shocking disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect sword style. Chen Changsheng felt that even though he was at the upper level of Ethereal Opening, abundant with true essence, because of his damaged meridians, the amount of true essence he could use was rather small. If it was a true battle for life and death, then he might not even be able to defeat his opponent,

much less help others.

Gou Hanshi chuckled. “I value your strength in other areas.”

Gou Hanshi saw him off all the way from the grass hut to the stone doors of the mausoleum.

The ground trembled as the stone doors slowly opened.

To those who cultivated the Dao, the Mausoleum of Books was the supreme and only sacred ground. Regardless of who one was, when the time came to leave the mausoleum, one would always feel some reluctance or else some complicated emotion. Yet Chen Changsheng’s expression was very serene. Just like that, he walked through the stone doors very casually, not even sparing a glance behind him.

Gou Hanshi as well as those monolith guardians that had caught wind of the news, upon seeing his scene, could not help but feel that it was a little strange.

It was just like many people had said before, Chen Changsheng’s attitude towards everything was too calm and unflustered, not like a fifteen-year-old teenager at all.

This was because he treasured his time. In addition, he had found the path that he wanted to walk, making him treasure his time even more. He also believed that there would be a day where he would enter the Saint Realm. On that day, he would return to the

Mausoleum of Books. Whether he intruded on the Divine Path or walked the same path as this time, there would be no problems. So why would he be reluctant to part? And if that day did not come, then several years later when he returned to the starry sky, what good would any further reluctance do?

After viewing the monoliths for twenty days, especially that period starting from yesterday of viewing the monoliths without sleep, in the end he succeeded in entering the upper level of Ethereal Opening. Besides this, there was one other extremely important reward. He finally understood the last sentence written in Wang Zhice's notebook—There is no such thing as fate.

Since the stars could move, then naturally there was no such thing as a fixed and unchanging fate. Perhaps his master Daoist Ji had wanted him to enter the Pavilion of Ascending Mist and find Wang Zhice's notebook so that he could find out about the secret of changing fate used by Emperor Taizu and Emperor Taizong. Only, Daoist Ji could not have imagined that in the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng would comprehend these things that would cause him to walk a different path.

He had an unprecedented confidence that he could change his fate on his own. He did not need to do it by changing the fates of others.

He had to enter the Concealed Spirit Realm before the age of twenty.

Indeed, no one in the world had ever done this before.

However, who said that he was unable to do it?

In the forest, Mao Qiuyu and the principal of the Star Seizer Academy looked at Chen Changsheng's figure, their moods complex.

The principal of Star Seizer Academy said, "He should be the youngest cultivator to reach the upper level of Ethereal Opening in history."

Mao Qiuyu nodded. "He's earlier than Mo Yu by two years.

After the Grand Examination, Chen Changsheng became one of the youngest cultivators ever to reach Ethereal Opening.

After viewing the monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books, he became the youngest cultivator to reach the upper level of Ethereal Opening. There were no others.

With these two points, he was apparently quite skilled at making what many viewed as impossible possible.

In the quiet and secluded forest, Chen Changsheng saw a youth standing under a tree. He could not help but be a little surprised.

There was someone that had actually left the Mausoleum of Books even earlier than him.

Chapter 234 - [In Spring I Sleep, Unaware Of The Dawn](#)

(TN: This title is taken from the first line of the poem “A Spring Morning” by Meng Haoran.)

The youth under the tree was Zhexiu. Chen Changsheng saw his pale face and the blood on the corner of his lips, and asked in confusion, “Why are you here?”

Zhexiu indifferently said, “I am going with you to the Garden of Zhou.”

Chen Changsheng did not think about this outcome. After a moment of silence, he replied, “It can be dangerous.”

Still expressionless, Zhexiu said, “Which is why I’m going with you to the Garden of Zhou.”

Chen Changsheng asked, “Why?”

“Tang Tang has already paid me. So I’m going with you to guarantee your safety.”

“You’re planning on being my bodyguard?” Chen Changsheng asked with a strange tone.

“Yes.” Zhexiu paused, then continued, “Of course, if the Garden of Zhou is too dangerous, I will have to ask for more money

afterwards.”

Even up until now, Chen Changsheng was still not used to this wolf youth’s manner of thinking. Spreading his hands helplessly, he said, “But I don’t need a bodyguard.”

Zhexiu glanced at him and said, “Although right now you’re at the upper level of Ethereal Opening, if we e thrown together in the same forest, the one that would come out alive in the end would most definitely be me. If the Grand Examination did not have so many restrictions, not allowing me to be as fierce, even if Gou Hanshi was able to defeat me, he would not be able to kill me. Then in the end, I would have been the one to kill him.”

Hearing these words made Chen Changsheng somewhat uncomfortable, because he knew that those words were true.

The next words Zhexiu said cause Chen Changsheng to make up his mind. “In addition, you still have to treat my illness.”

Chen Changsheng thought about it, then he said, “Then... let’s go together.”

Zhexiu very naturally took Chen Changsheng’s luggage, then he began walking out of the forest.

Chen Changsheng hurried after him and said with concern, “Being a bodyguard is fine, but how can I let you do such menial work?”

Zhexiu showed no expression and paid him no attention.

Chen Changsheng said, "Then I'll pay you extra."

Zhexiu stopped his steps, thought it over, and said, "This is a complimentary gift."

These two did not like talking very much. Amongst their peers, they were considered very uncommunicative.

They walked out of the woods, without exchanging a word along the way.

Jin Yulu and a carriage were waiting for them at the bridge.

The carriage wheels rolled over the hard limestone pavement, clacking along as they went. The new doors of the Orthodoxy Academy were pushed open from the inside. Xuanyuan Po ran out to meet them, his stalwart body was like a small mountain. The ground trembled as he ran, causing the dust in the cracks of the stone steps to fly about.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu stepped out of the carriage.

Xuanyuan Po gave a hearty laugh. "Coming out so early. It seems to me that you couldn't get much out of the monoliths, huh?"

Zhexiu creased his brows and looked at Chen Changsheng.

Somewhat embarrassed, Chen Changsheng explained, “He speaks rather bluntly, but he doesn’t mean any harm.”

“It’s not like I’m Tang Thirty-Six.” Xuanyuan Po unhappily said, then he took note of Zhexiu’s existence. Surprise, he said, “So it’s you? Don’t tell me that you actually went to the Mausoleum of Books to demand payment? Didn’t I say that there was no need to be in such a rush? When has my Orthodox Academy every failed to pay up?”

Jin Yulu at the side solemnly asked, “When will you be paying me? A gatekeeper also has a family to raise.”

The three youths turned to him, but they said nothing.

Jin Yulu felt a little awkward. “I know, I know, comedy does not suit me. Please continue.”

“Zhexiu did not come to ask for payment.”

Chen Changsheng told Xuanyuan Po, but he did not know how to explain Zhexiu’s presence. After some thinking, he said, “He came to the Orthodox Academy to take a look around.”

In the world of the demi-humans, Zhexiu’s name was very famous. Now that Xuanyuan Po knew that Zhexiu did not come to ask for money, he naturally returned to his mindset as a demi-

human youth. His face full of admiration, he told Zhexiu, “The old men in my tribe told me that when you were only three, you were able to kill demon snakes?

Zhexiu ignored him.

Xuanyuan Po followed him into the Orthodox Academy and continued, “I heard that when you were seven, you could kill demons?”

Zhexiu continued to ignored him.

Xuanyuan Po’s enthusiasm was not dampened. “It looks like you’re not going back to the snowy plains just yet. It would be great if you joined our Orthodox Academy instead.”

Zhexiu stopped.

Chen Changsheng also stopped and looked at Zhexiu.

Zhexiu seemed to think it over, then said to Xuanyuan Po, “If I stay around a [black bear](#) like you, I’m afraid I’ll become an idiot.”

(TL: Black bear (狗熊) can also mean coward.)

They were both demi-humans, so Zhexiu could naturally tell what Xuanyuan Po’s true body was.

Xuanyuan Po’s expression suddenly became very grave. He very

seriously said, "Take off that first character (狗), or else I will be very angry."

Zhexiu replied, "Fine, black bear."

Xuanyuan Po flew into a rage and blurted, "How could a person like you be just as troublesome as Tang Thirty-Six!?"

Chen Changsheng returned to the small building, washed his face and rinsed his mouth, then he went straight to bed. Last night, he had gone without any rest, so he was extremely tired. Now his mind had also calmed down, no longer in such a frenzy, only leaving behind satisfaction and warmth. All this mean that the sleep that he had was especially sound, such that even when someone came in, he could not tell that it had happened.

Mo Yu sat the edge of the bed, gazing at the youth's clean and delicate appearance. She slightly raised her brows, muttered some words, and took a whiff of the renewed scent. For some reason, her mood became much more pleasant. She lifted up a corner of Chen Changsheng's bedding, then in she went.

She very quickly fell asleep. Even as she dreamed, her smiling face was like a flower.

If the eunuchs in the Imperial Palace or the chancellors of the Imperial Court had seen her appearance, they would most assuredly have thought that they were seeing things.

Outside the window came the pitter-patter of spring rain. Mo Yu opened her eyes and woke up. As she languidly stretched her waist, she turned around and realized that Chen Changsheng was snugly positioned by her waist, sound asleep. Only now did she become a little embarrassed, and two blushes of red appeared on her elegant face. She quickly got up and left, disappearing into the spring rain outside the window.

Not much time had passed, then the door to the room was pushed open and Luoluo entered.

Seeing the soundly sleeping Chen Changsheng, she happily rushed over. Just when she was about to pounce onto the bed, she smelled the faint aroma of makeup.

She wrinkled her thin eyebrows, then moved close to Chen Changsheng's neck and carefully smelled it. Suddenly, she became angry and stamped her feet on the ground, causing the pearl-like raindrops in her hair to fall onto the floor.

Even though she was angry enough to stamp her feet on the floor, she did not really stamp her feet, because she did not want to wake up Chen Changsheng.

Looking out the window at the spring rain, she hatefully cursed, "Mo Yu, you shameless woman!"

She closed the window, blocking the soft and gentle spring rain and wind outside. Thus, the small building became whole. Now, there would be no more shameless women who would come to

disturb her teacher's rest. Only now could she relax. She brought a stool over to the side of the bed, then sat down and looked at Chen Changsheng's face with a beaming smile. She did not say anything or do anything, she just quietly watched him. She was satisfied with just that.

Chen Changsheng woke up and realized that his left arm was being held tightly. Hearing the gentle and relaxed breathing, without opening his eyes, he knew who it was and smiled. His arm was held for quite some time, which was always a bit exhausting. That crisp smell was a very familiar odor. How could he not know who it was?

Opening his eyes, he saw that it really was Luoluo sitting by the bed. He did not know how long she had been there, but she probably got tired from sitting for so long. Just like in the past, her two hands were customarily holding his arm, hanging over his body. Only that she still sat in a stool, making her position somewhat awkward. Of course, it was very cute.

With a trembling of her eyelashes, Luoluo woke up. Somewhat muddleheaded, she rubbed her eyes, then she realized that Chen Changsheng was looking at her. She quickly sobered up, feeling somewhat bashful, and yet even more happy. Crisply she said, "Teacher."

"Good girl." Chen Changsheng stroked her small face.

The two left the small building and sat for a while in the library, waiting for Xuanyuan Po and Zhexiu to come over so that Chen Changsheng could tell them what had happened in the Mausoleum

of Books. At noon, Jin Yulu prepared lunch. After eating lunch, Chen Changsheng and Luoluo took a stroll through the grounds of the Orthodox Academy. The spring rain was very light, so there was no need for an umbrella. It was just when they climbed atop the great banyan tree, and their feet were a bit wet.

Luoluo gazed at the capital through the drizzle, then turned to Chen Changsheng and asked, “Does Teacher want to go to the Garden of Zhou?”

They had been together in the Orthodox Academy for so long that Luoluo could be considered to be the only person in the world that most understood Chen Changsheng. She knew very well that if her teacher did not have some reason to leave the Mausoleum of Books, a person who valued time and opportunity as much as her teacher would absolutely not depart from the mausoleum, from the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, with such ease.

Chen Changsheng replied, “Yes.”

Luoluo opened her eyes wide and asked, “Why?”

Not waiting for an answer, she lowered her head to look at the ripples made by the rain as they fell into the pond under the banyan tree. Then she softly said, “Is it because teacher’s young lady is also going to the Garden of Zhou?”

Chen Changsheng was stumped for a few moments, then he realized that the young lady she spoke of was Xu Yourong. Although he had never thought about marrying Xu Yourong,

Luoluo's method of address still made him feel rather embarrassed. He replied, "What does it have to do with her? Only people in Ethereal Opening can enter the Garden of Zhou, and despite her shocking talent, she still had not managed that."

Last night, the Mausoleum of Books was bathed in starlight for an entire night. Dozens of people had broken into Ethereal Opening. It could now be assumed that Xu Yourong, first place in the Proclamation of Azure Clouds, was tarnished in comparison.

"Teacher's young lady broke through into Ethereal Opening several days ago."

At some point, Luoluo realized something, and a naïve and vivacious expression returned to her face. She gave a big smile and said, "In her body flows the blood of the phoenix. Such a proud person, even if she did not care that Teacher exceeded her, how could she lose out to all those other mediocre people?"

Chen Changsheng was a little astonished. It took a bit of time before he was able to digest this abrupt news.

The very first thought he thought of was the fact that very soon, the Proclamation of Azure Clouds would be changing its rankings.

"Congratulations." Chen Changsheng said to Luoluo as he smiled.

Luoluo mumbled, "This isn't anything to be happy about."

Xu Yourong had entered Ethereal Opening, so naturally she left the Proclamation of Azure Clouds. Last night many, people entered Ethereal Opening. If they left the mausoleum, they would also leave the Proclamation of Azure Clouds.

The value of the first rank in the Proclamation of Azure Clouds had definitely decreased a lot.

Chen Changsheng extended his hand to listen to Luoluo's pulse, then said, "The difference between demi-human blood vessels and human blood vessels is quite large, especially with the bloodline of the White Emperor. The innate talent in your blood is too overbearingly strong, so even though you're in the Meditation Realm, you can still defeat many opponents at Ethereal Opening. That's why you shouldn't worry so much. Though when the time comes, it will be somewhat more difficult for you to enter Ethereal Opening."

Now that he thought about it, he could not help but wonder how exactly Zhexiu broke into Ethereal Opening last night and what sort of ordeal he went through.

Luoluo suddenly looked at him and very seriously said, "Teacher, after you go to the Garden of Zhou and meet the young lady, you can't become softhearted."

Chen Changsheng remembered that she had previously been discussing how Xu Yourong was going to the Garden of Zhou.

It had already been many years since that white crane had delivered messages between them. He did not have much affection towards Xu Yourong, but it was not like he did not care. Even the disgust and loathing that he had once felt for her had not completely disappeared, but when he thought about actually meeting her, for some reason he had an indescribable sense of nervousness. The only thing he did not understand was why Luoluo had said these words.

Chapter 235 - Paying Respects To The Pope

Confused, Chen Changsheng asked Luoluo, “What do you mean by softhearted?”

Luoluo sighed. “Xu Yourong is a disciple of the Holy Maiden Peak and she is doted upon by the empress, so much that even her father benefits from it. In addition, after the Grand Examination, everyone knows that teacher was specially chosen by His Holiness. In the current state of affairs, you and her are rivals.”

Chen Changsheng still did not understand. When he was leaving the Mausoleum of Books, Gou Hanshi had even told him that being rivals did not mean that they could not support each other, then what about being softhearted?

Luoluo continued, “Regardless of if the Garden of Zhou contains Zhou Dufu’s legacy or some other magical powers, in the end, who ends up with what will depend who is faster and stronger.”

Chen Changsheng felt that if Tang Thirty-Six were here, he would probably say, “Don’t tell me it won’t be the virtuous?”. Thinking about that guy’s expression, Chen Changsheng could not help but smile.

Luoluo maintained her solemnity. “Teacher, can’t you be more serious? I’m not joking around.”

Chen Changsheng hurriedly apologized, then asked, “Are you saying that we can steal from each other in the Garden of Zhou?”

Luoluo replied, “As long as there’s no loss of life, nobody can object. This is why I said you can’t be softhearted.”

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng asked, “And then?”

“Teacher is very willing to do things for old time’s sake, and whenever you meet girls, you end up at a loss for what to do.” Luoluo cautioned him, “The young lady has an old relationship with Teacher, and she is so beautiful. I’m just worried that if you two meet in the Garden of Zhou, she won’t need to do anything except say a few soft words, and then you will be completely bewitched by her.”

He did not even know what Xu Yourong looked like, Chen Changsheng thought to himself, so what ‘old times’ were there to be sentimental over for? Not taking this lying down, he responded, “The person you describe seems really annoying, how can that be me?”

Luoluo thought to herself, ‘when I was throwing a tantrum, you said that you could not do anything, but this time you respond.’ It was only out of respect for her teacher’s dignity that she had not directly pierced through Chen Changsheng’s fragile guard. She said with heartfelt words, “At the very least, teacher must remember, the more pretty the girl, the more they will attempt to deceive others.”

Chen Changsheng looked at her and smiled, “Then, why is it that this pretty girl has never tried to deceive me before?”

Luoluo was somewhat startled, then she began to giggle and playfully hit him. She happily said, “Teacher, you’ve been with Tang Tang for too long. You’re getting better and better with your words.”

She seemed very happy, but in truth, she felt somewhat guilty. She thought to herself, if teacher knew that I was the same age as him, would he think that I was deceiving him?

Because of her guilt, she inevitably lost some control over the power of her punch. Coupled with the tree being slippery from the rain, Chen Changsheng almost fell off.

Luoluo quickly grabbed him, her eyeballs flitted about, searching for a new topic. Adopting an aggrieved expression, she said, “Teacher, I also want to enter Ethereal Opening.”

Chen Changsheng was least able to handle this sort of situation. In somewhat of a panic, he immediately began to console her. “As I said before, there are many people at Ethereal Opening that are no match for you, like me.”

Luoluo thought about how Chen Changsheng would soon be going far away. In a very short time, she would no longer be able to hear such warm and comforting words. Now, her expression truly seemed aggrieved as she said, “The problem is since I can’t enter Ethereal Opening, I can’t go with teacher to the Garden of Zhou.”

Chen Changsheng thought it over, then said, “Even if you were at

Ethereal Opening, would the Divine Empress or His Holiness allow you to go to such a dangerous place as the Garden of Zhou? Guardian Jin wouldn't allow it either."

Luoluo sighed, "Teacher's words really aren't very comforting."

Chen Changsheng felt somewhat ashamed. "I really am no good at this."

"Teacher, if you aren't going to see the young lady, then why is teacher going to the Garden of Zhou."

Luoluo suddenly sincerely asked. She knew that Chen Changsheng was someone that valued his time. Yet, he always spoke of the following his heart's desire. However, no matter how she viewed the choice to leave the Mausoleum of Books for the Garden of Zhou, it seemed to carry with it a sense of urgency.

Chen Changsheng said nothing. He used his hand to rub her hair, but gave no explanation.

Luoluo did not ask again.

The spring rain was like many lines blown about in all directions by the lake wind. It fell upon their faces and bodies. They got a little wet, but they were not in too sorry of a state. Chen Changsheng used his hand to push a strand of wet hair covering Luoluo's eyes to the side.

Luoluo looked at him and giggled.

Chen Changsheng also laughed.

Luoluo said, “Teacher, in a moment, come with me to the Li Palace. His Holiness wants to see you.”

The smile on Chen Changsheng’s face immediately disappeared.

In the evening, a carriage emerged from Hundred Flowers Lane and arrived at the Li Palace.

Guarded by more than a dozen demi-human experts and priests of the Orthodoxy, Luoluo continued on the carriage along that Divine Avenue to the Hall of Pure Virtue, passing the Temple Seminary and the Li Palace Academy.

Under the guidance of two bishops, Chen Changsheng followed a never-before-walked Divine Avenue to the main hall of the Li Palace.

In the blood-red light of the sunset, there was no sense of powerful armies, only gravitas and solemnity.

The priests and students walking on this Divine Avenue realized who he was and made way for him.

At this point, it was known throughout the continent that this

student from the Orthodoxy Academy, who had made the capital buzz with his disturbance, was specially selected by the Pope.

Of course, he had been famous before that. No matter what title he carried, such as Xu Yourong's husband-to-be or the first place upon the First Banner in the Grand Examination, they were all worthy to attract the gazes of the populace. Not to mention that not long ago, he had viewed the entire front mausoleum of the Mausoleum of Books in one day, causing the capital to be bathed in starlight last night.

Several hundred gazes followed Chen Changsheng on the Divine Avenue. Those gazes were complex... shock, admiration, envy, and even reverence.

Yes, the present him was finally worthy of being revered by others.

It had nothing to do with his level of cultivation or strength. It lay in his talent as well as the powerful figures behind him.

Chen Changsheng's mood at the moment was also very complex.

From the announcement of the rankings in the Grand Examination, he had known that there would be a day when he would be summoned by the Pope.

It was just that he had not imagined that the day would come so fast. He had just come out of the Mausoleum of Books and now, he

was at the Li Palace. He felt somewhat unprepared. He nervously thought to himself, in a little while I should ask those questions to ensure I get answers for them, then the Pope will not use his staff to beat me to death.

The numerous gazes that followed him made the Divine Avenue seem endless. Before, he felt somewhat out of place. However, he now was thankful for it, because it gave him enough time to organize those questions in his mind.

Even a longer Divine Avenue eventually had an end. Gates were pushed open one after another. The twilight gave way to darkness, and the Li Palace also grew dark. At last, they finally had arrived in front of the incomparably vast main hall of the Li Palace.

Standing amidst the dozens of sculptures of previous Saints and knights, taking in the solemn and radiant atmosphere, Chen Changsheng was speechless from shock.

Without time to appreciate any more of the atmosphere, he was taken to a side hall. The eaves of this hall extended out much further than normal palace halls, blocking out much of the light from the sky. Not even speaking of the fact that it was the time where twilight gave way to the night, even if it was high noon, this place would still be dark and quiet.

The two bishops retreated without a sound, leaving Chen Changsheng to stand on the stone steps.

This hall had no one else, so it only took a glance for him to see

the Pope.

The Pope was an elderly man. He had no crown or staff and he wore a coarse robe made of hemp. At the moment, he was watering a pot that held a green leaf.

This tall and thin old man was impossible to describe in terms of power and prestige, because he had long surpassed a secular concept like authority.

Chapter 236 - Successor

The Pope was a Saint.

With but a word, the countless believers of the Orthodoxy would die for him.

Chen Changsheng did not know what the first word that the Pope would say to him would be.

He was somewhat nervous.

Then, he heard three words.

“Come... come... come.”

The Pope beckoned him over as he said these words, indicating that he should come in.

Like a farmer calling his chicks, or a grandfather teasing his grandson.

Chen Changsheng stared blankly for a few moments, then he walked up the stone steps and stood before the Pope.

Having the Pope right in front of him really made Chen Changsheng feel incredibly nervous.

Even though he had met so many powerful figures after he had come to the capital, even with some that could be considered legends; he still found it hard to control his emotions.

After all, this tall, thin old man was the Pope.

On one side, the Pope continued to water the Green Leaf with his wooden ladle, while on the other side, he pointed at a chair and said, "Sit."

His voice was very gentle, and his manner was very casual.

Chen Changsheng sat on the chair like he was sitting on pins and needles. His entire body was uncomfortable and yet, he did not dare to move.

"Relax." The Pope looked at his appearance and smiled. "I know that there are many questions that you want answered. In order to save time, I will speak first. If there is anything you do not understand, or any question you want answered. If it is convenient for me to answer, then I will naturally give you one."

Saying this piece, his hand left the ladle, then gave a smile. "It will take around two hundred breaths of time for me to speak and to answer your questions. I presume that you can hold on for that long?"

Chen Changsheng knew that the Pope was speaking about how

his sitting posture was very uncomfortable, so he respectfully and cautiously nodded his head.

Without any preamble or any foreshadowing, the Pope began his narrative.

“Your teacher is called Daoist Ji. He has another identity and that is the previous principal of the Orthodox Academy. He is also my senior. There is no need to look at me like that. I am very sure that he only has these two identities, because the most likely third identity was ruled out by me and the Empress some time ago.”

“In other words, you are my martial nephew. Outside the Li Palace, they say that Tianhai Ya’er is my disciple, but this is not correct. I have no real disciple. In other words, you are our school’s only disciple. Then of course, I would look after you.”

“Between your master and me, there is enmity... a great enmity. I once killed him, but I did not think that he survived. Now that I have grown so old, I no longer feel like killing him again. Besides, even if he has committed an offense, it does not mean that you have also committed a crime. Nor does it mean that you must take responsibility for his sins.”

“As he agreed to let you enter the capital to end the engagement and took no measures to conceal his name, it means that he did not intend to conceal it from us. I even feel that he did so because he wanted me to take care of you. But you entering the Orthodox Academy was truly a coincidence. When you were taken to the Tong Palace, it was because I allowed Mo Yu to take you there.”

“How is it that I could cause her to move? That is because I am the Pope.”

“By staying in the Tong Palace for one night, the trials and hardships of the Ivy Festival could be avoided. Under the watch of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, you entering the three banners of the Grand Examination would not be too difficult. But I did not think that you would get to know Her Highness Luoluo, much less become her teacher. I did not think that you would be able to stimulate such great activity from the stagnant pool of water that was the Orthodox Academy. I did not think that you would be able to leave the Tong Palace and confront the trials brought by the Mount Li Sword Sect head on. In the Grand Examination, you unexpectedly managed to break into Ethereal Opening and then, you truly obtained the first place of the First Banner.”

Speaking up to there, the Pope suddenly paused, and then looked at him affectionately. “What I did not imagine the most but which should have been paramount in my mind, was that you are our school’s one and only disciple. How could you require my care? How could you require my plans? Not bad. This child really is not bad.”

The hall was quiet.

From the Pope’s first word, Chen Changsheng’s mouth had fallen open from shock and it had never closed.

The Orthodox Academy had always received considerable support from the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education. At the beginning, many people, Chen Changsheng included, had thought that this was a noiseless protest of the conservative faction of the Orthodoxy against the Pope and the Divine Empress, as well as a declaration. It was only after those multiple episodes of autumn rain in the tournament portion of the Grand Examination, as well as the Pope personally crowning Chen Changsheng as the champion, did the people finally realize that this had never been an internal matter in the Orthodoxy. It was a declaration from the Orthodoxy to the Divine Empress and the entire Imperial Court of Zhou.

From that one time, Chen Changsheng had many conjectures as to why the Pope valued him so highly. He was very certain that this care had something to do with his matter. However, no matter what he thought, he never could have imagined that the unremarkable middle-aged man in Xining Village's old temple was actually the Pope's senior. Nor could he have imagined that his master was the final principal of the Orthodox Academy that caused it to fall into ruin dozens of years ago.

“If there is something you want to ask, you may begin now.”

The Pope said this casually as he picked a small towel up from the table and wiped his hands.

Before this conversation, Chen Changsheng imagined that the Pope would have an extravagant and lofty way of speaking to match his powerful status. His words would be cryptic and profound, filled with countless hidden meanings that would have

to be carefully pondered to become aware of the truth. Who could imagine that the Pope would be able to so simply and swiftly explain all these things? The soothing wind on a starry night could not be as refreshing. The questions that he had thought up on the Divine Avenue had actually all been answered.

He did not know what questions to ask, but then he remembered that there were some details in The Pope's story that he questions about. He sincerely asked, "Your Holiness said that my master committed an offense. What offense?"

The Pope replied, "That year, he rebelled against the decision made by the Great Congregation of Light and supported the imperial family of Chen in rebelling against the Divine Empress. He brought the entire Orthodox Academy and more into that abyss with him."

The people of Zhou supported the imperial family of Chen, this is as it should be. What offense was there? Chen Changsheng said without the slightest hesitation. "That was not wrong."

"At the time, only if the Divine Empress ascended to the seat of the emperor would the government be stabilized. If not, the Great Zhou would inevitably break apart, and the fires of war would blaze once more. The demons would inevitably take advantage of this opportunity to invade the south once again. Whether the starting point or the objective was correct or not, in the eyes of us old people, as long as it affected the ability for humanity to resist the demons, it was wrong."

The Pope looked at him calmly, yet intolerant of any dissent. "It

has been several hundred years since that war. For children your age, there are very few people that have personally seen a demon. They are even less capable of imagining how the desperate the straits on the continent were in that year. If you knew, then you would also believe that our decision was correct.”

Chen Changsheng was young, but he had never been someone easily convinced. “Then what about now? As Your Holiness gets farther and farther from the Divine Empress, aren’t you afraid of affecting our ability to resist the Demons?”

“I have known the Divine Empress for several hundred years. I know what kind of person she is, so I have no objection on her rule of the Zhou Dynasty. The problem lies in the fact that no one can live forever. The entire continent must consider how the world will maintain its peace after her.”

The Pope seemed to think of something and his face seemed to fill with regret. He slowly said, “If the Tianhai clan puts forth a second Divine Empress, what harm is there in pushing the Chen Imperial clan aside a second time? Yet, it is impossible for the Tianhai Clan to raise a second Divine Empress. Then, the imperial family of Chen will, in the end, return to their former position.”

After Chen Changsheng heard this, he was quiet for a long time. Then he asked, “Even if it is this way, I still don’t understand. How could my master have guessed that you changed your mind?”

“When your master agreed to send you to the capital to end the engagement, he was also using you to communicate to us that he was still alive. He was also reminding me that you are our school’s

one and only disciple.”

The Pope repeated those words, then continued, “Regardless if I had changed my mind or not, I must take care of you, or else would I not be breaking our lineage? In this world, your master understands me the most, so your master is clearer on this point than anyone else.”

Chen Changsheng was somewhat at a loss. He was still unable to reconcile the image of the middle-aged man in Xining’s old temple with the famous principal of the Orthodox Academy. Then he thought of something. The Pope had said that he had cared for him because he had to continue the lineage of their school, but The Pope came from the Heavenly Dao Academy while his master came from the Orthodox Academy. How could these two be the same school? What school was he speaking of?

He asked this question.

“The Heavenly Dao Academy, the Temple Seminary, the Orthodox Academy, the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green and the Li Palace Academy... besides the Star Seizer Academy, the Six Ivies of the capital are places where the Orthodoxy nurtures the next generation. Yet in those days, the only people that cultivated in the traditions of the Orthodoxy were me and your master. This so-called lineage is naturally the lineage of the Orthodoxy.

The Pope looked at him serenely. “That year, your master almost caused a break in the lineage of the Orthodoxy. Now, it is your responsibility to take up and continue this lineage.”

Hearing these words, Chen Changsheng's face instantly paled. For a long time, he struggled to speak.

This did not mean that his mindset was lacking, it was just that this news was too astonishing.

The Orthodoxy's sole successor?

No matter who it was, if one was told that one would most likely be the next Pope, one would be stunned speechless. Even the insane Painted Armor Xiao Zhang was no exception.

Not to mention, Chen Changsheng was only a fifteen-year-old teenager.

The hall was silent. The wooden ladle was suspended in the air, slightly slanted. A trickle of water, like a strand of silver, incessantly fell into the pot. The Green Leaf in the pot faintly trembled, several droplets of water sparkling on its surface.

After who knows how long had passed, Chen Changsheng awoke from his daze. He looked at The Pope, and asked, "This isn't a matter that I should have to consider now, right?"

His voice was very dry and hoarse. It was somewhat unpleasant to the ear. It was clear that it was caused by his nerves.

“In the past, Mei Lisha and I were afraid of giving you too much pressure. If you were not mature enough, you might have collapsed. Right now, it seems that we have worried too much.”

The Pope looked at him quietly. His eyes were peaceful and deep, like they could see through everything. Chen Changsheng felt that all the secrets in his body and spirit were all laid bare. This was a very uncomfortable feeling. Thankfully, in the next moment, the Pope shifted his gaze, lifted his hand, and once again grabbed onto the wooden ladle.

Two hundred breaths of time had passed. The water in the ladle had been exhausted. This round of questions and answers was over.

It was time for Chen Changsheng to leave, but he did not want to leave. Before, he felt that he had no questions to ask. However now, he realized that there were still many things that he wanted to know.

Such as the Mausoleum of Book, such as the Garden of Zhou, such as the stars.

Such as... the Orthodoxy.

Chapter 237 - The Young Principal

At the start, he thought that he had no questions to ask, but later, he realized that there were countless problems which he had not gotten the answer for. Facing the Pope's eyes which felt like they could penetrate through the world, Chen Changsheng remained silent for a long time. Although he was still young, it did not mean that he did not understand. He knew that there were certain questions that he could not bring up, such as Xining village, or his senior, or the Orthodoxy. He could only ask things that he was allowed to ask.

Such as the Garden of Zhou?

After the Pope heard his question, he gave a smile. "There are several important objects in the Garden of Zhou that you must obtain, because you represent the Li Palace."

Chen Changsheng directly asked, "Who would fight against me for them?"

Those words seemed somewhat arrogant, but in reality, they were honest. Within the Zhou Dynasty, who would dare compete with the Li Palace? In his heart, he already knew the answer. He only needed confirmation.

The Pope replied, "The Orthodoxy is separated into the north and the south. Since you go to the Garden of Zhou as a representative of the Li Palace, those who would dare vie with you are naturally southerners."

The Pope did not tell him what exactly the objects he was supposed to obtain in the Garden of Zhou were, he only told him that he would know when he saw them. In truth, Chen Changsheng had already guessed as to what the objects were. It was just that the Pope had not spoken of them for some reason, so naturally he also was unwilling to bring it up.

Recalling the words that Luo Luo had said atop the great banyan tree, he knew that his opponents in the Garden of Zhou would probably be Ethereal Opening experts from the Holy Maiden Peak, the Longevity Sect, and the Scholartree Manor.

As well as that girl.

“Will Xu Yourong really be entering the Garden of Zhou?” He asked.

The Pope seemed to grasp his meaning. Faintly smiling, he said, “On the day you entered the Mausoleum of Books, a message arrived from the south. In a small village, Xu Yourong broke directly into the upper level of Ethereal Opening. In other words, her cultivation level is exactly the same as yours. If you two were to meet in the Garden of Zhou, it would surely be extremely interesting.”

Chen Changsheng was silent. He knew that if their cultivation levels were equal, then he was absolutely no match for her. Due to this fact, he remained silent for quite a while before continuing, “What about Qiushan Jun? Based on the rumors, he loves Xu

Yourong and cares deeply for her. If Xu Yourong enters the Garden of Zhou, then he should be accompanying her.”

He did his utmost to keep his tone as calm as he usually was, but he was only fifteen years old after all. At some points his tone became strange, especially when he said the word “loves”.

The Pope smelled that faintly acrid smell of the hall that had been stirred up by the wind, and his smile grew larger. “Which is why I said that it would be extremely interesting. Ten days ago, Qiushan Jun successfully broke into Star Condensation, so he is not allowed to enter the Garden of Zhou. So regardless of what Xu Yourong does in the Garden of Zhou, he has no means to disturb her.”

These words contained a mischievous, and even annoying, side of the Pope which was completely at odds with his stature. Chen Changsheng could only be stupefied for a few moments before waking up.

Suddenly, he realized the important part of the Pope’s words, and his face showed a somewhat astonished expression.

“Qiushan Jun... broke into Star Condensation?”

“Previously when he was stealing the key to the Garden of Zhou from the demons, he suffered serious wounds. Contrary to expectations, it brought series of fortune, and treating it as an opportunity, he successfully broke through.”

Chen Changsheng contemplated this in silence. If he remembered correctly, Qiushan Jun was almost twenty years of age. He had not participated in a Grand Examination, nor had he entered the Mausoleum of Books Yet, he still managed to enter Star Condensation. Xu Yourong was younger than Chen Changsheng by three days and she had not entered the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths either, yet she had actually entered the upper level of Ethereal Opening.

He silently sighed to himself, so that is what a true genius is.

He cultivated the Dao of following his heart, so he paid particular attention to keeping his heart calm. In addition, he truly did not have much affection towards Xu Yourong. Yet, for some reason, whenever she was mentioned alongside Qiushan Jun, he would always feel somewhat awkward. What made him feel even more uneasy was that no matter how many miracles he had produced, Qiushan Jun was always there to put him in his place.

In the Grand Examination, he obtained first place upon the First Banner, but Qiushan Jun obtained the key to the Garden of Zhou. He entered the Mausoleum of Books to view the monolith and reached the limits of Ethereal Opening, but Qiushan Jun did not even need the Heavenly Tome Monoliths to enter Star Condensation. The great affairs of the country compared with the small affairs of the individual and not requiring external help compared with requiring outside help. How could the latter be considered stronger?

“I believe that you are stronger than Qiushan Jun.”

The Pope apparently knew what he was thinking and smiled. “Even if other people do not think this way, they would also not dare to say that you were weaker than Qiushan Jun.”

Chen Changsheng shook his head. “I’m not as good as him.”

The Pope calmly replied, “You are four years younger than him.”

Chen Changsheng stared at him blankly, then happily smiled.

The Pope continued, “As for Xu Yourong... she is the daughter of Xu Shiji after all.

Chen Changsheng was silent. Since Xu Shiji was the Divine Empress’s dog, Xu Yourong naturally stood on the same side as the Divine Empress and the southerners. In other words, she stood opposite to the Orthodoxy.

He thought of an extremely terrifying possibility. “Does the Divine Empress know of my origins?”

The Pope nodded. “Mo Yu had long ago sent someone to Xining Village to investigate your origins. This matter could never be kept hidden forever. After the Grand Examination, I spoke to the Divine Empress about it.”

Chen Changsheng sat in silence for a while, then asked, “Won’t the Empress... ?”

“No.” The Pope smiled at him. “If the Empress does not want to tear apart our alliance, then she will not. At the very least, on the surface, she will not act against you, because that is the equivalent to making my entire Li Palace her enemies. Nobody wants that situation, even if she is the Tianhai Divine Empress.”

What was self-confidence? This was self-confidence.

“The items in the Garden of Zhou are naturally very important, but never forget that the true enemy has always been in the north. This time, the key to the Garden of Zhou has landed in our hands, but there is no way that the Demons will let it go so easily. If Black Robe still lives, he will have planned something. Inside the Garden of Zhou or outside, as long as you have not returned to the capital, you must remain cautious and vigilant.”

“Many thanks to the Saint for his guidance.” Chen Changsheng said.

The Pope replied, “Do you have to call me a Saint?”

Chen Changsheng said somewhat awkwardly, “Yes, Martial Uncle.”

The Pope smiled in satisfaction.

At the end of the conversation, Chen Changsheng brought up a demand.

As the Pope had previously said, on the last night of the Ivy Festival, he told Mo Yu to take Chen Changsheng into the Tong Palace. Then, he should know very well what lay beneath that cold pond.

“I want to see that Black Dragon.” He sincerely asked the Pope.

The Pope had not imagined that the only request Chen Changsheng would bring up was actually this. Smiling, he asked, “I hear that you’ve apparently met with that Black Dragon?”

Chen Changsheng recounted his meeting with that Black Dragon under the pond, but he left out many details. Nor did he mention that it was there that he attempted Meditation Introspection and almost burned himself to death. He only spoke of the agreement that he had with it, that if he was allowed to leave, then he would find time to come back and see it again. That was the promise that he made.

“Although it is an evil dragon, a promise is a promise.” The Pope was apparently satisfied at how Chen Changsheng valued promises. “When Wang Zhice chained it under the pond all those years ago, he truly was rather ungenerous.”

Chen Changsheng asked, “Then how can I go to see it?”

“The well near the New North Bridge is already open.”

Saying these words, the Pope took a wooden placard out and handed it to him.

Chen Changsheng took the placard and saw the words carved into it: Orthodoxy Academy.

“This is... ” Chen Changsheng looked at the wooden placard in confusion.

The Pope smiled. “This is the Orthodox Academy’s school nameplate.”

Chen Changsheng still did not understand.

The Pope said, “Only the principal of the Orthodox Academy is allowed to hold this nameplate.”

Chen Changsheng still did not understand, or more accurately, he vaguely understood, but he was unable to believe it.

The Pope smiled at him. “In our first proper meeting, as your martial uncle, I have to give you a gift to commemorate our first meeting. Only opening the well by the New North Bridge seems a little too petty. How about this nameplate?”

Chen Changsheng did not know much about this nameplate. He did not know what type of wood it was made from nor how many years of history it possessed. He only knew that it had suddenly gotten much heavier.

“Coming from Xining to the capital, then accidentally entering the Orthodox Academy. Now that I think about it, how could that not be some sort of sign? Under the hands of your master, the Orthodox Academy was destroyed. It is only right that it should be under your hands that it is reborn.”

The Pope said sorrowfully to him.

Only then did Chen Changsheng realize that as soon as he had taken the nameplate, he had become the newly appointed principal of the Orthodox Academy. Only... what did it mean to be the principal of the Orthodox Academy? In the past two decades, the Orthodox Academy had fallen into ruin, resembling a cemetery. Despite this, it was still one of the Six Ivies. In the past, it once stood shoulder to shoulder with the Heavenly Dao Academy. It was the oldest of the academies. In addition, earlier today in the afternoon, Luoluo had told him that last month, the archbishop of the Hall of Subjugation had fallen ill and died. Mao Qiuyu, the principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy, had been promoted to the rank of the Orthodoxy's Six Prefects.

He was only fifteen years old, and yet suddenly he was now the principal of the Orthodox Academy? He suddenly felt that not only was the nameplate getting heavier, it was also starting to burn his hands.

He had not gotten far from the hall when he heard the sound of coughing from the side of the path. As he turned, he saw the head of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, Archbishop Mei Lisha. He hurriedly walked forward to pay his respects.

Mei Lisha looked at him and smiled, then indicated that he should walk with him. In his slow voice, he asked, “Do you understand everything now?”

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng replied, “For the most part, I understand.”

Mei Lisha looked up towards the stars in the night sky. Some time passed before he finally said, “You know that I am very old?”

Mei Lisha continued, leaving no time for Chen Changsheng to respond. “Currently in the Orthodoxy, His Holiness and I are the oldest. To be old is a good thing. One is able to see all sorts of things. Yet to be old is also a bad thing, because one remembers too many things. To live this way is somewhat exhausting.”

“What happened to the Orthodoxy back then, even now I still remember it clearly. Yet strangely enough, I have actually somewhat forgotten what had happened in the Orthodox Academy nearly two decades ago.”

Mei Lisha coughed twice, then continued, “I knew your teacher very well, so I was the first to realize your identity. Back then, I still was not clear about the His Holiness’s intentions, so I waited for some time before telling him. Of course, you can also understand your teacher’s prudence.”

Chen Changsheng still had not fully grasped the situation, so he remained silent. At night, the Li Palace was very quiet. They

walked along the stone path between the halls. The resplendent lights on the distant Divine Avenue could faintly be seen.

There was a question that he had been afraid to ask the Pope. Now he had finally suppressed the worries in his heart and uneasily said, "I am somewhat worried for my master."

"Mo Yu sent someone to Xining Village long ago, but you have no need to worry. On that day, all the experts of the Zhou Dynasty besieged the Orthodox Academy. The Empress and His Holiness personally took action. Since your teacher could even live through that, right now this is nothing."

Chen Changsheng looked into the elderly man's squinting eyes and sincerely said, "I am thankful for the care Your Eminence has given me in this past year."

Mei Lisha squinted his eyes, then smiled like an old fox. "Living in the capital is actually very easy, because wanting to die is a very difficult affair. The people who live here are all on good terms with each other, and they are all willing to do things for each other for old time's sake."

Chen Changsheng earnestly took in the meaning of those words.

Mei Lisha turned towards him and said, "But outside the capital, it is not so. Especially outside the borders of the Zhou Dynasty, it is full of dangerous hardships. Out there, only you can look after yourself."

Chen Changsheng remembered the Pope's words and said worriedly, "Black Robe... could he actually still be alive? Could the demons have some sort of plot for the opening of the Garden of Zhou?"

Mei Lisha replied, "Since the key to the Garden of Zhou is in the hands of humanity, no matter how determined the demons are, they still have no means of seizing the initiative, so there is no need to worry too much. On the contrary, you must not forget that in my Great Zhou, there are some people whose intelligence is a far cry from Black Robe, but in terms of mercilessness, shamelessness, and contemptibility, they far exceed him. You must be wary of those sorts of people."

Chen Changsheng knew that he was speaking of Zhou Tong.

Arriving at the Divine Avenue in front of the main hall, Mei Lisha stopped. "I will send you up to here."

Chen Changsheng clasped his hands in respect and bowed. "After this junior returns from the Garden of Zhou, this junior will come to see Your Eminence again."

Mei Lisha shook his head. "Too low."

Chen Changsheng was a little stunned. He did not understand the meaning of those two words.

"You bow too low."

Mei Lisha looked at him and smiled. “You are now the principal of the Orthodox Academy. The only people deserving of your full bow are His Holiness and the Divine Empress. Other than those two, there is no need to pay your respects to other people like that.”

Only now did Chen Changsheng realize that his status had already changed.

He was now of equal status with the archbishop of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education.

From the depths of the quiet Li Palace suddenly came the distant bright ringing of a bell. This bell was not a signal to return home, but rather signified an official edict from the Orthodoxy. The contents of this edict spread faster than the night wind, reaching all the palace halls and every county and country in the continent.

“From this day forth, there is no need for you to lower your head.”

Mei Lisha smiled, then turned and left.

Chen Changsheng stood by the Divine Avenue, somewhat dazzled, not believing that any of this was true.

Two bishops stood atop the Divine Avenue, waiting to send him out. Previously, when they had brought him into the Li Palace,

their manner could be described as calm and polite. Now they could be considered to be even more respectful.

The hierarchy of the Orthodoxy was extremely distinct. In the Li Palace, the dividing lines between classes had always been strict. He was no longer a new student from the Orthodox Academy. He was the principal of the Orthodox Academy. Naturally, he would be looked upon with a different sort of reverence.

The tall lamps illuminated the ramrod straight Divine Avenue.

Under the care of the two bishops, Chen Changsheng followed the Divine Avenue out of the palace.

The priests that they had encountered moved to the sides of the path.

Previously, when he had entered the Li Palace, he had encountered a similar scene.

Only that previously when the priests had stepped aside, they only needed to meet his gaze. However now, they could not do so, because what was polite then was rude now. They had to bow to Chen Changsheng now.

As the teenager walked through, several hundred priests paid their respects, their expressions humble, their voices coming one after the other.

“I pay my respects to Principal Chen.”

“My respects to Principal Chen.”

“Greetings Principal Chen.”

Chapter 238 - The Cinnabar Birthmark Between Her Eyebrows (Part One)

Mei Lisha walked back into the hall, then asked the Pope, “What did the two of you talk about?”

The Pope thought about it, then said, “We talked about everything, but... it was like we did not talk about anything.”

After he said those words, he shook his head. “That child asked about things that had nothing to do with him. I heard none of the questions that I thought I would hear. He did not ask about the Orthodoxy, or about the stars. He did not ask about the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, nor did he ask about the so-called intentions.”

In the entire continent, the greatest authority on deciphering the Heavenly Tome Monoliths was this hemp robed old man. Not even the southern sects’ Holy Maiden could exceed him in this aspect. In the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng had been enlightened on some matters, but he also had many questions. Yet today in the Li Palace, he had not mentioned a single word about it.”

“He still lacks confidence.” Mei Lisha said in his coarse and slow voice.

“Although the child has not lived for many years, he is not stupid. To suddenly experience so many earth-shaking events, there is no way that he could wholeheartedly trust us.”

The Pope was unconcerned and smiled, “Later on, he will naturally find out that all that we have done has always been for his own good.”

Mei Lisha became silent at those words. Then he said, “Before, I worried that he was maturing too slowly. But now, it seems that he has grown far faster than anyone had imagined. Should we not constrain it somewhat?”

The Pope did not answer.

Leaving the Li Palace, Chen Changsheng felt that his waist was somewhat sore. Previously on the Divine Avenue when all those hundreds of priests had been greeting him one after the other, even though he had only given them a slight bow in return, it was still somewhat strenuous.

Leaving those countless gazes and returning to his company of one, he felt somewhat disoriented. He turned around to look back at the Li Palace. Seeing those silent and speechless stone pillars, he also became silent and speechless. Within that palace, he had enjoyed countless sceneries, yet for some reason, he had a faint sense of unease, even fear.

He had long ago guessed that his master was no ordinary man, but he had not guessed that his master was this special. Moreover, for the past year, he had put his heart and soul into cultivation and the Grand Examination and he had no time to think about these things. It turns out that tonight, the truth about it all came to light in the Li Palace. The shock was so severe that it made his body turn cold.

Just as the Pope and Mei Lisha had just discussed, there were many things Chen Changsheng had not mentioned in the Li Palace, and many question that he had not asked. For instance, he had not brought up that he had a senior. If the Orthodoxy truly needed a successor, then his senior was far more suited for the position. He had also not brought up the special situation in his body. The Pope's eyes were as deep as the ocean, seemingly able to see through all. Perhaps the Pope already knew everything about Chen Changsheng, like the two daoist youths in Xining Village's old temple. Like the knowledge he had comprehended from the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. Like how the meridians in his body were all broken. Yet the Pope did not mentioned them.

The Pope and Mei Lisha had both said that nothing would happen to the Xining Village, but how could that be possible? The Divine Empress would absolutely send someone to hunt down and kill his master and senior Yuren. He was uncertain if master and senior would be able escape. Furthermore, nearly two decades ago, the Orthodox Academy was destroyed by the Pope and the Divine Empress. The Pope even personally took action. Why did the Pope care for him so much? Was it because of those reasons? In his old age, was the Pope getting nostalgic? Those sorts of reasons were very hard to believe. He could not completely trust the Pope, even though the Pope seemed so compassionate, so worthy of his trust.

Phrases like tongue twisters bounced around in his head. To believe or to not believe, why and why not, his expression became somewhat frustrated. He absent-mindedly thought, if what the Pope said was really true, then from tonight on, his life had apparently entered a completely different stage.

From Xining Village to the capital. From the old temple to the Orthodox Academy. By the will of others or by his own will. The greatest shadow that hung over his head through all this was the Divine Empress.

The Divine Empress herself was a peerless expert of the Saint Realm. She relied upon the thirty or so Divine Generals to control the Great Zhou's millions of soldiers. She had the devotion and loyalty of Yu Wenjing, Zhou Tong, Mo Yu, and the Tianhai Clan as well as the love and reverence of the masses. It could be said without a doubt that she was the continent's most powerful human.

If it was any other person in Chen Changsheng's situation, they would have committed suicide long ago.

However, it was just as the Pope had said, even the Divine Empress was unwilling to come in direct conflict with the Orthodoxy. This was because in this world, the only establishment that could be considered her equal was the Orthodoxy. The Orthodoxy had been the religion of the Zhou Dynasty from its founding and it possessed countless believers and millions of priests. This was why the Pope could speak with such confidence.

And he... he was now the successor to the entire Orthodoxy.

As Mei Lisha had told him on the Divine Avenue, he no longer needed to lower his head to anyone.

However, this good fortune had arrived just too suddenly, so how

could he believe it?

It all returned to trust and reason.

Why?

These matters were all too complex. Although Chen Changsheng was an erudite scholar of the Daoist Canon, even knowing the most profound and incomprehensible scriptures by heart, he still was not very good at this sort of thing.

This was because all of this had to do with the will of the people.

He wanted to find someone to consult with, but Tang Thirty-Six was still in the Mausoleum of Books. Even if he were here, he would definitely just say the opposite of whatever Chen Changsheng said. Luoluo's status was too special and sensitive. Even if her status was disregarded, no matter how Chen Changsheng would say it, she would definitely take him at his word. What sort of consultation would that be?

Despite the vastness of the capital, he could not find anyone to speak with about what had occurred to night. This made him feel very lonely.

In the deep night, the lights of the Li Palace still shone as brightly as ever. Chen Changsheng turned into a dark and quiet alley, his right hand resting against the hilt of the dagger at his waist.

He circulated the Qi in his body, and his breathing gradually calmed.

There was a faint noise, like a choked bang. However, the dagger had never left the sheath. It was only sword energy.

It was a sword energy of the Wind and Rain Sword of Mount Zhong.

Borrowing this sword energy, Chen Changsheng also used the Yeshe Step. Amidst the chilly wind, his figure suddenly disappeared. With his deceptive movements, he suddenly disappeared into the night, his destination unknown.

After a while, several people suddenly appeared around the dark alley.

The eyes of these people had the remnants of shock.

They all looked each other in the eyes and immediately knew who each of them worked for. Without any sort of warning, they all scattered.

The technique that Chen Changsheng had used to leave seemed simple, but it was actually rather complex.

Those people that the great powers of the capital had sent to monitor him were unable to track him down.

At last, Chen Changsheng had finally entered the ranks of the experts.

The ringing of the bell in the Li Palace announced to the entire continent that Chen Changsheng was the new principal of the Orthodox Academy. This news shocked the people of the world once again.

From the Imperial Palace to the Tianhai Clan, to the Divine General of the East's Mansion, there were many people who could not sleep because of this news. They incessantly analyzed exactly what this would mean.

As the target of all this speculation and discussion, Chen Changsheng was currently in the southern part of the capital, strolling through a bustling night market.

He first went to the famous Quyuan Roast Lamb restaurant at the head of the street and ordered an entire roast lamb. Afterwards, he began to purchase things from the vendors on the street.

Half an hour later, he appeared under tree outside the New North Bridge.

It was a late spring night, but the temperature was not as cold as it had been the past few days. There was not much dew on the blades of grass.

In the distant imperial city, the lights in the corner of the wall illuminated the ground. The light made the tender buds sprouting from the trees seem particularly green, like freshly-picked tea leaves.

This place was very close to the walls of the Li Palace and it was thus heavily guarded. The night ospreys atop the wall who monitored nighttime activity were especially watchful, their eyes shining like pearls in the darkness.

Chen Changsheng hid his body in the shadow of the tree and began to feel out his surroundings. When the squadron of imperial guards was off in the distance, when the night osprey perched on the southeast corner of the wall turned its head left on schedule, he suddenly made his move. With the tiniest of puffs of sound, two balls of dust rose up from under the tree. Two clear footprints had been left behind, but he had already disappeared without a trace.

After a while, the dust gently fell back down, and coincidentally covered up those footprints.

During all this, his body was like a ghost, arriving above the mouth of the abandoned well.

To arrive at the well from under the tree had only taken him one step.

Right then he only had time to think, if the Pope was lying, he would most definitely have fallen into an extremely miserable situation. Would this be considered a sort of test of his trust?

Whoosh.

He landed perfectly in the abandoned well, not even his clothes had touched against the wall.

This sort of accuracy was truly somewhat shocking.

The bottom of the well was once again dug up.

Chen Changsheng fell from the bottom of the well directly into that seemingly abyssal underground space.

He immediately became enshrouded in endless darkness. He could only see the extremely faint glimmer of starlight, and he could only hear the increasingly harsh whistle of the wind.

He fell for an unknown amount of time. The air around him suddenly became viscous, and the speed at which he descended naturally began to slow.

At the end, he floated down to the ground like a leaf. As he put his foot down, there was a cracking sound. He had probably stepped on a piece of ice.

He had already come here multiple times, so he was not alarmed. Taking out a night pearl, he began to illuminate his surroundings.

Along with the shine from the night pearl, the several thousand night pearls that studded the ceiling of this subterranean space slowly began to glow. The pitch-black world became as bright as day.

There was a groaning sound. That was the sound created from the distortion of space.

Chen Changsheng lifted his head and saw the mountainous body of the Black Dragon slowly float over.

The body of the Black Dragon was truly too enormous. As it moved, the sound of the cold wind became increasingly mournful.

The Black Dragon stopped in front of him, and its palace-sized head filled Chen Changsheng's vision.

Chen Changsheng happily smiled, then waved at it and said, "Zhizhi, I've come to see you."

The Black Dragon's eyes were indifferent, its whiskers lightly moved to and fro.

As they moved, countless flakes of frost fell from its body, before being blown by the wind into Chen Changsheng's face.

Chen Changsheng used his hand to wipe off the frost, not at all distressed.

He saw the mischievous look in the dragon's eyes and he knew that it was just teasing him, or else punishing him for coming to see it in so long.

After, he saw the wound in between the dragon's eyes.

In comparison to the Black Dragon's head, this wound was very small.

However, in Chen Changsheng's eyes, this was a fierce and terrible wound.

He clearly remembered that the Black Dragon never had this wound before.

“Who did this?” He asked gravely.

Even if the Black Dragon was imprisoned under the Imperial Palace, that did not mean that it could randomly become the target of insult and torment.

To leave such a frightening wound on its brow, it was imaginable how powerful that person was.

However, Chen Changsheng did not care. He only thought of demanding justice for the Black Dragon.

That was because right now, he was very angry.

Chapter 239 - The Cinnabar Birthmark Between Her Eyebrows (Part Two)

Chen Changsheng really was very angry.

Right before the Grand Examination, he had succeeded in Purification, and had even achieved perfect Purification. Although he had been unconscious for the entire ordeal and could not recall what had truly happened, he knew that it definitely had something to do with the Black Dragon.

He had lived and was able to obtain the first rank of the First Banner in the Grand Examination. He had been able to enter the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths and comprehend the monoliths. He was able to bathe the entire capital in starlight. All of this had been bestowed upon him by the Black Dragon.

To him, the Black Dragon was even more important than the person that saved his life. When he saw the wound between its eyes which still seemed to be bleeding, when he faintly made out the white bone, deep in the wound, when he imagined the pain it had suffered, he could not help but be moved.

Yes, it was as the Pope had said in the Li Palace, that legendary Black Dragon was an evil dragon. However, even if it had committed such monstrous crimes against the capital, and several hundred years of imprisonment underground was not enough to atone for its crimes, how could such abuse be allowed?

The Black Dragon calmly floated in the air, listening to Chen

Changsheng's angry question. Its eyes were incredibly serene. There was no pain or fear. It did not grow angry with him, nor was it deeply moved, only holding detachment and disregard.

Under its indifferent gaze, Chen Changsheng felt like an idiot. For some reason, he felt quite embarrassed. Could he have misunderstood something?

After a long time, he felt it was necessary to break the silence. He asked with some hesitation, "...this is the first time since that day that I've come to see you. Are you alright?"

The Black Dragon did not answer, nor did it give any other sort of response.

As he had said, although Chen Changsheng was not clear on what had happened that day he first attempted Meditative Introspection, he knew that it could only have been with the aid of the Black Dragon that he was able to escape calamity.

"I don't know how to thank you, so I brought some things that you would normally like to eat."

He placed the entire roast lamb that he had ordered on the floor in front of the Black Dragon. Its fragrant aroma and heat spread forth, only to be immediately frozen by the air.

"You should first quickly eat the lamb. We can take our time with the rest."

He suggested this as he saw the congealing oil on the lamb leg.

He continued to take out more food. Roast chicken, roast deer tail, roast goose, beef hotpot with pickled vegetables, cask-soaked tofu, phoenix fruit...in a short time, the floor was densely packed with dozens of dishes.

The Black Dragon's eyes seemed to gleam, but it still remained unmoving and unspeaking.

Chen Changsheng thought that it was somewhat strange. It was true that in the past few times he had come to this underground space, besides teaching him dragon language, the Black Dragon very rarely talked with him. However, it had never been as quiet as it was tonight, perhaps due to disdain, or perhaps it found speaking to be very strenuous.

“What’s wrong? Are you angry because I haven’t come to see you in so long?”

He looked at the Black Dragon and explained, “After that night, I woke up in the Orthodox Academy. Apparently someone must have brought me back. I realized that I had succeeded in Purification and wanted to find you, but found out that someone had filled in the well...I think it was probably the person that brought me to the Orthodox Academy. Afterwards, I was busy preparing for the Grand Examination, and then this past month I was in the Mausoleum of Books viewing the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, so I really didn’t have the time to come and visit.”

In truth, he did not need to explain this much. However, he still wanted to explain.

His eyes were extremely clear and his expression was very sincere.

Perhaps it was for this reason that the Black Dragon's whiskers lightly floated up. Amidst the brilliance of the night pearls, it waved twice. This signified that it would, in a short while, enjoy his offerings.

Chen Changsheng was content with this and began to chat with the Black Dragon.

"I really have to thank you. Without you, there would have been no way for me to obtain the first place of the First banner in the Grand Examination."

He narrated the events of the Grand Examination, then described how at the announcement of rankings, the Pope himself had personally crowned him with the garland of thistles. He did not mention what had happened in the Pavilion of Ascending Mist, but he did describe in fine detail the sights he had seen in the Mausoleum of Books, as well as the events that had occurred in the monolith huts.

"I have seen many rubbings of the monolith inscriptions, but before I entered the Mausoleum of Books, I always had this sort of fantasy. I thought that maybe those inexplicable Heavenly Tome

Monoliths were written in dragon language.”

Chen Changsheng smiled at the Black Dragon. “When I was small, I studied the dragon language, then I was taught by you for a few days. If the monolith inscriptions were really written in dragon language, then I would have had an advantage over the rest.”

The Black Dragon’s eyes were filled with ridicule and disdain.

Somewhat embarrassed, he laughed and said, “Only when I entered the mausoleum and looked at those inscriptions did I finally realize that I was overthinking it.”

This was a rather embarrassing matter, but his laughter was filled with joy.

He gradually brought his laughter under control, before he said a few words to the Black Dragon very sincerely. As he said these words, his expression was extremely solemn, even somewhat grave.

“After viewing the Heavenly Tome Monoliths for over twenty days, I saw all seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum on the very last day. At the very end, I realized a secret...the stars can move.”

In the Li Palace, in front the Pope, he had not even mentioned this matter.

However, the Black Dragon viewed Chen Changsheng's trust as being beneath its contempt, even to the extent that it saw his solemnity and graveness as so laughable that the ridicule and disdain in its eyes increased.

Chen Changsheng stared blankly, and only after a while did he come to.

Of all living beings in the world, dragons could fly the highest. They could break through the clouds and soar above the nine heavens. As for Black Frost Dragons, this supreme clan of royal dragons, legends said that once they were fully grown, they could fly freely through the galaxies. Even if the Black Dragon had been unable to fly amongst the stars itself, how could it not know that the stars could move?

He had seen it as going against common sense, even so much as a new discovery contrary to the truth, but to the Black Dragon, this was probably a very common knowledge. When he so gravely told the Black Dragon that the stars could move, it was like seriously telling the fish that it was calm under water, or telling the birds that clouds were made of water vapor...

“It seems like I overthought things once again.”

He looked at the Black Dragon helplessly and was at a loss. “In this case, it should be that many people should know about it, so why is it that no one has ever brought it up before?”

The Black Dragon still paid him no attention.

Chen Changsheng had no other option but to talk about something else, something to be happier about. He cheerfully said, “Did you know? Right now I’m at the upper level of Ethereal Opening.”

In his view, the Black Dragon was at least several hundred years old. It was naturally the most senior of seniors——this achievements, that had been acquired under the care and guidance of a senior, should obviously be promptly reported.

The Black Dragon still looked upon him with contempt and ridicule.

Chen Changsheng continued to monologue to himself, “Right before this, I went to the Li Palace. I learned...that His Holiness is actually my martial uncle. Yeah, he said that I was their school’s sole disciple, so in the future the Orthodoxy will have me become its successor. Although I still think it’s quite preposterous, His Holiness seemed very serious.”

Hearing these words, the contempt and ridicule in the Black Dragon’s eyes finally disappeared. Even if it was a member of the most supreme and powerful dragons, even it had to pay an appropriate amount of respect to the successor of the Orthodoxy.

“Of course, the truth is...”

Chen Changsheng thought it over, then changed the subject again. “I’m going on a long journey to the Garden of Zhou. It might be a long time before I’ll ever be able to see senior again.”

“Yeah...my fiancée, Xu Yourong, is also going to the Garden of Zhou. I’m thinking that if I meet her, I’ll need to return the marriage contract. This is what her father has required of me.”

“I know that she doesn’t want to marry me, but if I return this marriage contract to her, she won’t necessarily be happy about it. Her handmaid, Shuang Er, came to the Orthodoxy Academy once to find me and I can guess at what she was hinting. She plans on using this marriage contract, naming me as her fiancé so we can be a fake husband and wife, allowing her to put all her efforts into cultivating the Dao.”

“On the surface, this sort of thing would do me no harm, but I don’t like doing things this way, so I don’t like her either. Due to this, I will directly relieve the both of us of this engagement.”

After Chen Changsheng spoke this most important decision aloud, he suddenly felt much more relaxed. Standing up, he prepared to take his leave. “After I return from the Garden of Zhou, I will come to visit senior again.”

The Black Dragon watched him in silence. Its eyes seemed to gleam, as if it wanted to say something, but in the end it remained silent. Perhaps it had wanted him to stay a bit longer.

Leaving the underground space, the place where he emerged was

that same cold and cheerless abandoned palace, next to the pond that people rarely approached. Chen Changsheng was already experienced in this. Walking over to the edge of the pond, he took a towel and dried his body, before changing into a new set of clothes.

After doing all this, he realized that, in a cluster of flowers, there was a pair of eyes that had been staring at him this entire time. He could not help but recoil in surprise, then smiled and shook his head. “Luckily it was only you that saw me.”

The Black Goat slowly walked out of the flowers, proud and indifferent. Its meaning was very clear: And just what is there to see about a little man like yourself?

Chen Changsheng hurriedly followed him.

There was no key around the Black Goat’s neck. That key had always been in Chen Changsheng’s possession. The goat was only supervising him.

Passing through the numerous palaces and avoiding the patrolling guards, he finally arrived before the Imperial City’s ivy-covered secret door. Chen Changsheng used the key to unlock it, before passing through it.

He turned around and looked at the Imperial Palace, silently thinking to himself. Who was it that had always been helping him? Was it that middle-aged lady? Or was it the Pope?

In that underground space, there are many things that he had said many things that he would say to no other person to the Black Dragon. However, he did not bring up Senior Yuren, nor did he bring up anything about Xining Village's old temple. This was because the Pope had already admitted that he had purposely let him meet the Black Dragon, so what did that mean? It was never wrong to be somewhat more prudent.

Chen Changsheng returned to the Orthodox Academy.

The Black Dragon remained in that cold subterranean space. It had nowhere to go, no home to return to. Several hundred years had passed since it had been locked away.

Of course its name was not Zhizhi. Its dragon name was incredibly long. If written in the words of humans, it would probably require a few dozen pages. Moreover, many years had passed since it had been called out to by a fellow dragon, so it had even forgotten parts of its own name.

The light of the night pearls gradually dimmed.

In the cold air, a strand of magical power slowly disappeared. It had been a magical power similar to a smokescreen.

The mountainous body of the Black Dragon floating in the air rapidly began to shrink. Accompanied by the scattering of countless motes of light, it finally disappeared.

A small girl dressed in black sat on the floor.

The floor was covered with snow. Similarly, her expression was as cold as the snow.

She , as enchanting as the night. On her brow was a red line, like a cinnabar mole.

Seeing that roast lamb covered with congealed oil, she knit her brow in displeasure.

She opened her mouth and spoke the human language. “This idiot, does he want to stuff me to death?”

She had still not recovered from the blood that she had shed that day, so it was still not possible for her to assume her dragon form. As a small girl, she could only look at the roast lamb, not eat it.

Then she saw the braised chicken wings wrapped in oil paper.

She took a piece and placed it in her mouth, quietly sucking on it. Her brows raised in delight, like a flower blooming.

Braised chicken wings were her favorite dish.

Chen Changsheng had also brought some fine oolong tea.

She poured herself a cup and slowly began to drink it.

For some reason, her expression became somewhat sorrowful.

At this point, a voice echoed throughout the underground space.

“A fine tea.”

Towards this voice, the girl's expression subtly changed. There was some hate, but there was even more fear.

Chapter 240 - [Different Souls](#)

(TL: This refers to the Chinese conception of soul as being made up of two parts: Hun (魂), the spiritual soul which goes to heaven on death; and Po (魄), the animal soul which remains with the body.)

The cold winds suddenly calmed, the night pearls suddenly began to glow. The Divine Empress appeared before her. As she glanced at the two iron chains around the dragon's feet, she said. "The tea is good, but the man?"

The girl stared warily at her and said nothing.

The Divine Empress looked at her and continued. "You gave up a drop of your true dragon blood to help Chen Changsheng. Just who did you think you could hide your plans from?"

The girl put down the tea and apathetically said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

The Divine Empress calmly said. "Regardless of if you plan to have him help you get something, or send some message back to the dragon tribe, or concoct some method to break Wang Zhice's imprisoning spell, none of it is possible. He is too young, and to have all the qualities you require would take him at least another two hundred years."

The girl realized that all her plans had been grasped by this terrifying woman, and her expression grew even colder. "So what?"

“Chen Changsheng has told you much. Since you’ve been listening, then you should know that it will be very difficult for him to live past the age of twenty. Because of this, the chances of you succeeding in carrying out your plans are basically zero.”

The Divine Empress continued, “If you help me with a certain task, after ten years I will release you.”

The girl’s slit-shaped eyes narrowed, becoming even more enchanting. “What task?”

The Divine Empress placed her hands behind her back and gazed at that gloomy and barely visible ray of light. After a moment of silence, she said, “Help me understand just who Chen Changsheng is.”

The girl stared blankly, not quite understanding the sentence.

Chen Changsheng was Chen Changsheng, how could he be anyone else?

“I want to know just how old he is and what is wrong with his body. I want to know why Daoist Ji would raise him, and I want to know how much of the conversation between the Pope and him in the Li Palace was true and how much of it was false.”

The Divine Empress withdrew her gaze and calmly looked at the girl. An indescribably powerful pressure suddenly descended upon

the vast underground space, grinding the ice on the floor into a fine dust.

The girl's voice slightly trembled as she asked, "How would I know these things?"

"Because he trusts you. That is very important." The Divine Empress replied.

As if attempting to explain something, she hurriedly said, "I don't even know why he trusts me!"

The Divine Empress calmly replied, "Perhaps it is because of the first time he met you, he already said too much, so he no longer cares and now tells you everything."

After a moment of thought, the girl replied, "This isn't very logical."

The Divine Empress calmly looked at her said, "There is still the most important reason."

Confused, the girl asked, "What would that reason be?"

The Divine Empress indifferently replied, "You're not a human."

The girl's brows tightly knit together in irritation.

“If...the Demon Lord and the Pope were in front of me, who do you think I would trust more?”

The Divine Empress looked at her and gave her a smile that was not a smile.

The girl was deeply confused.

Between the greatest enemy and the most reliable comrade, was there any need to think about it at all?

The Divine Empress gave her no time to think. “So?”

The girl looked at the oil paper-wrapped chicken bone and the remnants of the tea left in her cup, then blinked and said, “Fine, I agree. If you let me go, I will go with him and report back to you on all his whereabouts.”

She reached behind her back and pulled out the chains, then she looked at the Divine Empress and seriously said, “Madame must first help me break these chains. Thank you.”

The Divine Empress calmly looked at her and said, “To go so far is too troublesome.”

Saying these words, she walked in front of the girl and stretched out her right hand to space between the girl’s eyebrows, as if she wanted to caress that wound.

The girl's vertical pupils suddenly contracted as she felt an incredible sense of danger.

The flash of cunning that had appeared in her eyes had long since disappeared, leaving only fear and unease.

Her black hair floated around her, as they rustled.

Her lips slightly opened as she prepared to furiously roar.

Yet she was powerless to do anything, even unable to avoid the Divine Empress's palm.

Although the Divine Empress's right hand seemed to fall very casually, in truth it was like heaven and earth were conforming to its will. There was no way to escape from it.

There was a light slap.

The Divine Empress's right hand landed between her brows, covering that line of blood.

The girl's body furiously trembled, her face turning deathly pale. Her pupils contracted until they gradually disappeared. It all seemed extremely painful.

After a while, the Divine Empress slowly withdrew her hand.

Along with her hand, the image of a black dragon slowly emerged from the wound.

That black dragon image was about half a chi long and as wide as a fingernail. Struggle as it might, it was incapable of escaping from the Divine Empress's palm. Inch by inch, it was extracted from the girl's brow.

This black dragon image seemed to be both real and illusionary. It seemed to live, and yet it was clearly not any sort of living being.

It was a microcosm of the Black Dragon, as well as its soul.

While the Black Dragon was still alive, the Divine Empress had managed to extract its soul.

At the end, this black dragon soul had been completely taken out.

The line of blood on the girl's brow grew increasingly red. On its surface gradually formed a plump bead of blood. Now it seemed like it had truly turned into a cinnabar birthmark.

With the extraction of the dragon image, the girl became abnormally exhausted, and her body fell limply to the floor.

The Divine Empress took a jade [ruyi](#) from her waist.

Everyone knew that the Divine Empress had two pieces of jewelry that never left her body.

In her hair was an ebony hairpin, its tip painted with a dot of captivating red, as if it had drunk blood. Its rear was damaged in places and it was extremely old. Yet it had never been switched out, because it was the third-ranked weapon on the Tier of Legendary Weapons, the sole hairpin amongst its ranks.

The other piece of jewelry was this ruyi bracelet that was always tied to her waist. No one knew what sort of use this ruyi had that it was treated on par with that ebony hairpin.

In the next moment, the Divine Empress poured the Black Dragon's soul into the ruyi. It seemed very simple, almost like the sleight of hand of some swindler, but in reality it was one of the world's most supreme divine abilities.

The jade ruyi suddenly came to life, transforming into a small black dragon.

That small black dragon lay still in the Divine Empress's hands. It seemed very weak, but its eyes burned with fierce resentment as it stared into the Divine Empress's eyes.

“You are a dragon, so your blood is innately condensed. As long as it is not for too long, ripping your spiritual soul from your animal soul should do you no harm. In addition, if you had not willingly given up your true dragon blood, even I would have no means of taking a wisp of your three wisps of dragon soul, so if you

must resent someone, you should first resent yourself.”

The Divine Empress looked at the small dragon in her palm and calmly said, “You should know how cruel the consequences are if the spiritual soul does not return, so when you go to the Garden of Zhou, you should behave yourself.”

On this spring night, the night was as bright and beautiful as it was during the day. Under the starlight, the trees seemed to be filled with vitality. The Divine Empress took her leave from the well. She strolled in a leisurely manner through the lively spring atmosphere.

Not far from her was a carriage. As she approached, the black rhinoceros hitched up to the carriage went down on its knees in humility, or more accurately, reverence. At the same time, a pale-faced middle-aged man also knelt down.

The long river of history still flowed on, and there were still some people that had not died. Their names had not yet disappeared, but they were certain to become some of the most unforgettable sights on that long river. One of these names was Zhou Tong. It was an absolute surety that in these tens of thousands of years that passed, he would still be remembered as one of history’s most ruthless officials and treacherous ministers. Whether it was the extraordinary cruelty of his torture, or the number of ministers he had executed on fraudulent charges, he would place first without a doubt.

To both government officials and the common people, Zhou Tong was an enigmatic individual. Outside of important events

like the Grand Examination, he mostly stayed in the secluded and sinister office of the Ministry of Personnel in the southern parts of the capital. On his occasional excursion, he would always be guarded by countless experts. He rarely saw others, and even when he met with fellow colleagues in the halls of the Imperial Court, or interrogated prisoners, face would always be obscured by a black veil.

Generally speaking, only women, especially beautiful women, would wear a black veil. This peculiarity of Zhou Tong's was the subject of much ridicule. Many people thought that because Zhou Tong's methods were too cruel, his actions too shameless; he had no face to see his ancestors, no face to see the heavens and the earth with. Thus he would obscure his face year-round. Of course, these jeers, or perhaps curses, were only whispered in the dark. They would definitely not land in Zhou Tong's ears.

The people probably could not imagine that Zhou Tong was actually an average looking middle-aged man. Only because he spent too much of his time in the prison and always had his face obscured by a veil, his face was rather pale.

“Your Majesty, I do not know how to handle Chen Changsheng.”

Zhou Tong continued to speak with a low voice, “Considering his connections to the Li Palace, I am unable to use torture.”

The Divine Empress smiled, but said nothing.

The entire continent knew that Zhou Tong was the Divine

Empress's most loyal and most insane dog. In the eyes of many, he was certainly her most obedient dog.

However, in reality, this was not the case, because Zhou Tong understood dogs very well.

If the master told the dog to stop barking, and the dog stopped barking, it did not necessarily mean obedience. On the contrary, if the master told the dog to stop barking, but the dog continued to bark because there was something outside the door, then even if the master had to scold it in front of guests, or strike at it, the master would inwardly feel happy, thinking that it was truly a good dog.

This sort of disobedience was true obedience.

Zhou Tong knew very well when he should bark and when he should stay silent. He knew when he should leap into a scuffle, and when he should directly tear through the throats of Her Majesty's enemies.

The Divine Empress had always been satisfied with his performance. Even though he had committed so much evil and had become an enduring stain on the flourishing world of the Zhou Dynasty, she would never once think about taking this dog and cooking it in a pot, then feeding it to its victims. That was because she was very pleased that this dog would not be a dog like Xu Shiji who would never mature. Moreover, she cared not for the assessment of the history books, so why should she care for the talk of common people?

“What do you think We should know from Chen Changsheng?”

The Divine Empress indifferently asked.

It was very strange. Even when she ascended to become Empress, she very rarely referred to herself using the royal ‘We’. Only before Zhou Tong would she refer to herself as such. The ministers of the court had also grown accustomed to referring to her as the Divine Empress. Zhou Tong was the only one who insisted on addressing her as ‘Your Majesty’.

Zhou Tong replied, “Since Your Majesty has allowed him to live up to this point, then it must be because Your Majesty wants him to say something.”

In this world, only the dead did not speak.

The Divine Empress pondered this in silence, then said, “I want to confirm some things.”

Zhou Tong softly said, “If I cannot use torture, then...should I use death?”

The Divine Empress laughed at these words, then brightly said, “I once asked Mo Yu a question, and now I can ask you the same thing.”

Zhou Tong replied, "I will be pleased to answer the Empress."

The Divine Empress asked, "Do you believe that there is anyone in the world that is unafraid of death?"

Zhou Tong seriously pondered this question for a long time, then finally said, "I do not believe it."

The Divine Empress smiled. "Before I did not believe, but afterwards, I realized that there really were people that did not fear death."

Not waiting for Zhou Tong to reply, she continued, "A man who does not fear death, how can he not fear it?"

Zhou Tong thought hard but found no answer. He asked, "How can Chen Changsheng not fear death?"

"Because he is a real person, true to his heart and true to his own nature."

The Divine Empress placed her hands behind her back and looked in the direction of the Orthodox Academy. There had been another reason that she had left unsaid—that youth had death as a constant companion—she silently thought, if he was true to his feelings and true to his nature, if Chen Changsheng was able to live past twenty, then would he perhaps really become the second Zhou Dufu?

Chapter 241 - The Big Rat In The Pile Of Junk

The black rhinoceros pulled the carriage away from the New North Bridge and pulled it to the Orange Garden.

One of Zhou Tong's subordinates knocked on the front door of the Orange Garden. Mo Yu, who had just been preparing to go to bed, slightly frowned at the man standing in her main hall. "You may not have to attend the court, but I still have to wake up early."

Zhou Tong looked around at the famous paintings on the walls and said, "I was just with Her Majesty at New North Bridge just now."

These words were very abrupt, and sent without any reason.

Mo Yu's expression suddenly became very serious. "What do you want to say?"

"I want to say, I am very afraid."

Zhou Tong said these words calmly and his face held no trace of fear, and yet, for some reason, this Orange Garden, whose spring warmth was maintained by a spell, suddenly dropped a few degrees in temperature.

Mo Yu stared into his eyes and realized that the pale whites of his eyes were bloodshot, making them somewhat ghastly. She asked, "Just what are you afraid of?"

Zhou Tong gave a nervous laugh and asked, “Are you not afraid?”

Mo Yu indifferently replied, “I have no time to keep an adult like yourself company while you go senile.”

Zhou Tong forced down his smile and expressionlessly said, “The entire continent knows what the greatest problem currently facing humanity is: the position of the Emperor of the Zhou Dynasty. Although Her Majesty has thought of returning the throne to the Chen Imperial clan, she is unresolved. She knows that if she doesn’t, then the entire Tianhai clan will be completely annihilated. Even though they say that the Tianhai clan is not synonymous with Her Majesty, Her Majesty still bears the surname Tianhai, so how can she steel herself to see a tragedy such as that play out?”

Mo Yu frowned and said, “As you said, the entire continent knows this.”

Zhou Tong continued, “So Her Majesty has always hesitated. The Tianhai family has taken her hesitation as a chance. In the eyes of Prince Chen Liu and all the other princes in the counties, this hesitation is the shadow of death. Her Majesty’s continued reticence also has another reason: The Li Palace has never made their position clear.”

After a moment of silence, Mo Yu replied, “So just what are you trying to tell me?”

Zhou Tong expressionlessly said, “I want to say, tonight, His Holiness finally made his position clear. He does not agree. The Orthodoxy does not agree. So now, will Her Majesty continue to hesitate?”

Mo Yu did not respond.

After the Grand Examination, many people realized who Chen Changsheng’s original master was. The Pope had personally admitted it——Chen Changsheng’s teacher was the previous principal of the Orthodox Academy, the firmest supporter of the Imperial clan. Almost two decades ago, he had joined hands with the Imperial clan in an attempt to overthrow the Divine Empress’s regime.

Tonight, the Pope allowed Chen Changsheng to become the principal of the Orthodox Academy.

The position this decision represented was extraordinarily clear.

If the Divine Empress insisted on keeping the Tianhai clan on the throne, the Pope and the Li Palace would no longer stand on the same side with her. They would assume the same role that the Orthodox Academy played in the past.

Mo Yu asked, “You believe...the Empress has already made up her mind?”

Zhou Tong was silent, then said, “Her Majesty can willingly

abdicate in exchange for the continued existence of the Tianhai clan.”

“Preposterous!” Mo Yu angrily declared, “How can the Empress abdicate? And if the Imperial clan could be trusted, why would the Empress have hesitated for so many years?”

“What if His Holiness acted as a guarantor?” Zhou Tong stared into her eyes and said, “You think that even if Prince Chen Liu ascends to become Emperor, that he would dare to ignore the Orthodoxy?”

Mo Yu was somewhat stunned by these words. Only after a long period of time had passed did she finally speak. “If it really is this way...”

She suddenly smiled, “Then that’s also fine.”

“For the position of Emperor to be smoothly handed over, for the world of humans, of course this is good. For the Tianhai clan to continue existing, even if not as well-off as it was before, this is also fine.”

Zhou Tong looked at her with a smile that was not really a smile. “But for the two of us, where is the benefit?”

Mo Yu calmly said, “The Empress will naturally arrange things for us.”

Zhou Tong replied, “Such disrespectful words. One day, Her Majesty will inevitably board a raft and swim upon the sea of stars. When that day finally comes, where will the two of us go?”

Mo Yu had no answer.

Zhou Tong continued to look into her eyes as he continued speaking, “Under His Holiness’s orders, you have done many things. Why has the Empress never blamed you? Because the Empress can sense very clearly the unease in your heart, just like the fear in mine...Those people in the Li Palace have never liked either of us, so you planned to ease your way into good standing.”

Mo Yu met Zhou Tong’s gaze and calmly replied, “So what? When that day really comes, there’s really no way for you to survive. There are simply too many people who want you dead. As for me...I only want to live, I don’t care about much else.”

Zhou Tong once again gave that forced smile. “Is that so? When some member of the Chen Family becomes Emperor, and you’re given a choice between death and becoming his woman, would you be willing? Then I don’t care either.”

There was a subtle change in Mo Yu’s expression. Somewhat jittery, she shouted, “Just what are you proposing?”

Zhou Tong replied, “First, at the very least, we must ensure that Her Majesty does not decide rashly.”

Mo Yu pensively said, “You want to break the tacit understanding between the Empress and His Holiness?”

Zhou Tong replied, “I wouldn’t dare to. I only want His Holiness’s position to lose its effectiveness.”

Mo Yu shook her head. “You can’t kill him. The Empress would absolutely not allow it. He has done too much for the Zhou Dynasty. At the very least you can’t go and kill him now.”

Zhou Tong said expressionlessly, “I’ve killed many meritorious ministers and generals.”

Mo Yu stared into his eyes. “But he has made an even greater contribution.

To break through from the Meditation realm to the Ethereal Opening realm was the most difficult to pass of the three bottlenecks of cultivation. This was because it was the first time most cultivators would experience a life or death situation. With the slightest lack of caution, one could easily end up going insane. If the mind was unclear, one might die on the spot. The proportion of people that died this way was extremely high. For countless years, there had been many cultivators that were on the threshold of Ethereal Opening, but did not dare to attempt to step over it.

When Chen Changsheng had deciphered all seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum, he had triggered that starlight phenomenon. This indirectly helped dozens of monolith viewers break through. In only one night, humanity suddenly welcomed

many more Ethereal Opening cultivators into its ranks. Even the sum of all the disciples who broke through to the Ethereal Opening realm every year from the Six Ivies, the Scholartree Manor, and the Holy Maiden Peak could not exceed the number that broken through into Ethereal Opening in that one night alone.

In the future, just how many of these people would enter Star Condensation and become true experts?

As Gou Hanshi had said, everyone should be thanking Chen Changsheng. Every school and sect should be thanking him. The Zhou Dynasty and all of humanity should be thanking him. Tonight, when the Pope had directly appointed Chen Changsheng as the new principal of the Orthodox Academy, there was not a single word of protest within the Orthodoxy. Presumably, tomorrow there would be no one outside the Orthodoxy who would protest. This was because they all understood that this was merely repayment for a meritorious service.

Zhou Tong went silent for a very long time, then suddenly said, “Tonight, Her Majesty said that he was a real person.”

Mo Yu was astonished at these words. She had not imagined that the Empress’s evaluation of Chen Changsheng was so high.

“He has merit, and so I’m not allowed to kill him. He’s a real person, so I’m not able to kill him, but in the end, something must be done.”

Zhou Tong shook his head and walked out of the Orange Garden,

incessantly murmuring to himself like a nagging old lady.

Mo Yu gazed at his back with some concern.

In the Orthodox Academy's small building, that warm bedding truly did smell very good.

She did not wish to never be able to smell it again.

Even if the bedding was even warmer and more comfortable, it would still not be enough to break Chen Changsheng's schedule.

At five in the morning, he promptly woke up, opened his eyes, washed his face, and rinsed his mouth, then went with Xuanyuan Po to the Mausoleum of Books.

The soldiers responsible for watching over the mausoleum probably had not heard about the Orthodoxy's new appointment, so they were the same as ever.

One after another, people emerged from the Mausoleum of Books. There were some monolith viewers that had entered in previous years, but there were even more of this year's Grand Examination examinees. These people were like Chen Changsheng, preparing to go to the Garden of Zhou. When they saw Chen Changsheng standing outside the stone doors, they were like the soldiers, not knowing that he was the Orthodox Academy's new principal. However, regardless of that, they all sincerely paid respects to him, even if some of them had unnatural expressions

on their faces.

Only after Gou Hanshi had sent Qi Jian and Liang Xiaoxiao out did Chen Changsheng learn that Tang Thirty-Six was still on that mental journey of his. Regretfully, he had no other choice but to turn back and leave.

That same night, after Chen Changsheng had treated Zhexiu with acupuncture, Zhexiu went to the library to meditate. Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po began to tidy up the kitchen— It was unknown when Tang Thirty-Six would leave the Mausoleum of Books, and Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu would probably stay in the Garden of Zhou for at least a hundred days. As a result, the kitchen would most likely be unused for an extremely long time, so there were many things that needed to be tidied up before they left.

“I can’t go again. I’m really useless.”

Xuanyuan Po said these muffled words as he sat by the basin and washed dishes, his back facing Chen Changsheng.

Only cultivators at Ethereal Opening were permitted to enter the Garden of Zhou.

Chen Changsheng looked at the demi-human youth’s tall and sturdy back and recalled how similar it was to how he found him last year at the night market. Consoling him, Chen Changsheng said, “It’s no problem, you just need a little bit more time.”

Indeed, Xuanyuan Po innate talent was very exceptional, or else he would not have been so well-treated by the Star Seizer Academy. Only that on the first night of the Ivy Festival, he had been too severely injured by Tianhai Ya'er and his entire right arm had been crippled. Although under Chen Changsheng's treatment it had slowly recovered, he still had to train it from scratch, but it would only be a matter of time before he returned to his former strength. In addition, with Chen Changsheng's research on methods for the demi-humans to cultivate with human methods, he would certainly explode with power one day.

Chen Changsheng naturally began to think about Tianhai Ya'er, the little monster that had once caused many people to feel nervous. He could not help but shake his head. He found it impossible to disperse that sense of loathing he had. It was just like how some women would always be afraid of rats. Regardless of if they were experienced and knowledgeable, or if they never left the walls of their own home, even if they were a Star Condensation expert; they had all at one point shrieked at the sight of a rat.

A sudden scrambling sound arose from the corner of the kitchen, followed by the sound of squeaking. This sound was very weak. If Xuanyuan Po and Chen Changsheng had not been cultivators, they probably would not have been able to hear it.

“Eh? I just cleaned this place a few days ago, how can there be mice again?”

Xuanyuan Po stood up and wiped his hands off on his clothes. He randomly picked out a thick piece of charred firewood from the stove and walked over to the corner.

Amidst the pile of junk in the corner, there was something faintly moving.

“It’s pretty big!”

Xuanyuan Po’s eyes went wide. He tightly held the firewood and slammed it down with all his strength.

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, did it really require such strength? Even if the rat was beaten to death, the floor would suffer a few cracks as well...suddenly he felt that something was not right. That sound had felt somewhat familiar. He opened his mouth and moved his hands to stop Xuanyuan Po, but he was too late.

With a muffled bang, all the junk was turned into dust. The upper half of the firewood suddenly disappeared. That terrifying strength sent dust flying everywhere.

As the dust settled, Xuanyuan Po stared at the still-moving thin and long black-colored animal on the ground. In complete shock, he yelled, “What in the world is this? It’s actually not dead!”

That black-colored animal flew in front of Xuanyuan Po’s eyes.

Xuanyuan Po thought it was a snake or some limbless lizard, but... how could it fly?

There was a slap as the black animal used its tail to give him a slap.

Xuanyuan Po stared blankly at this scene before him. His mouth opened wider and wider, his tongue grew increasingly clumsy. Losing his mind out of fear, he yelled, “Dragon...dragon...dragon...dragon!”

He then fainted straightaway.

Chapter 242 - Journeying Together

When the real dragon appeared up in front of Xuanyuan Po's face, he was truthfully rather frightened, yet that had not been enough to make him faint. The real reason for why he fainted was that the Black Dragon had, in its fury, released some of its dragon aura. For a Demi-human like Xuanyuan Po, he was absolutely incapable of resisting that ancient and terrifying Qi.

With a gust of wind, Jin Yulu appeared, his shirt lightly flapping in the breeze. He warily looked around. As soon as he had sensed that frightening Qi, he immediately rushed over from the gatehouse. The Li Palace had appointed Chen Changsheng as principal of the Orthodox Academy. Could it be that it had already attracted some peerless expert?

Yet when he finally arrived in the kitchen, he could sense nothing. Seeing Xuanyuan Po knocked out on the floor, he asked in a deep voice, "What happened?"

"It's nothing." Chen Changsheng explained, "I was unblocking one of his meridians, but then some of his true essence began to flow backwards. With a little rest he'll get better soon."

Jin Yulu creased his brow. He found that Chen Changsheng's expression was somewhat unnatural, yet he could not sense any of that terrifying Qi anymore. After examining the scene again, he took his leave.

Chen Changsheng rubbed his forehead, sighed a breath of relief,

he knelt down to wake Xuanyuan Po up.

Xuanyuan Po's face was painted with fear. He looked all around, his face deathly pale.

At the Ivy Festival, this demi-human youth had shown extraordinary bravery and courage when confronting the vicious Tianhai Ya'er. Yet the previous scene had already exceeded his imagination.

As a demi-human, he had felt an innate crushing terror towards the dragon's aura.

“Did you see...a...black dragon?”

Xuanyuan Po did not see any sign of that terrifying existence, yet this only made him more worried. His voice shuddered with fear.

Chen Changsheng was originally going to tell him that he was seeing things, but he knew that it would not convince Xuanyuan Po. After a moment of silence, he said, “It came to find me. Don't say anything about it.”

Xuanyuan Po pointed at Chen Changsheng, his lips trembling, unable to speak. Only after a long while did he finally stammer out a few words. “Just who hell are you?”

Many people wanted to know who Chen Changsheng was, but he was incapable of answering that question.

Because to him, this had never been a question. He was Daoist youth from Xining Village's old temple. Even though his master Daoist Ji had so many secrets, that did not mean that he did as well.

Of course, right now, he had a secret: that Black Dragon.

Back at the small building, he placed his dagger on the display rack and then walked over to the table and looked at that tiny Black Dragon. After a very long time, he still was not convinced that he was not hallucinating. Only when he finally summoned up the courage to run his fingers along the Black Dragon's body and feel its icy scales did it finally prove that all that had happened was real.

The tiny Black Dragon clearly did not like him touching it, so it slapped his hand away.

"This...just what is going on here?" Chen Changsheng nervously asked.

The tiny Black Dragon said nothing but flew to the table, rubbed itself in ink, and used its body as a brush to put a few words on paper.

It was very cute, but Chen Changsheng had no time to pay attention to such things.

He took up the paper and only then understood that this was the result of a secret technique for the spiritual soul.

This secret technique allowed the soul of a dragon to split from its massive body, allowing it to assume some other appearance. It originated from when the dragon tribe first transformed into humans, only that it was even more mysterious and challenging. The downsides of this method were that the dragon's spiritual soul could not be too far from its body. There was also a time limit. If the spiritual soul did not return to its original body, it would gradually dissipate.

In addition, a dragon in this state was extraordinarily weak, no longer possessing any of its original supreme strength. It would even require the protection of humans.

Seeing this tiny Black Dragon before his eyes, Chen Changsheng found it impossible to reconcile with the mountainous body of the Black Frost Dragon in the underground space.

“You figured out this secret technique yesterday, and today you want to accompany me around the capital?”

Incomparably shocked, he said to the tiny dragon, “And you need me to keep you safe?”

The tiny Black Dragon floated in front of him and nodded its head.

Chen Changsheng kneaded his forehead in silence. It was only after a long time did he say with difficulty, “I’m going to the Garden of Zhou. I don’t know what I’ll encounter. If something happens, what then?”

The tiny Black Dragon said nothing, and only quietly watched him.

Chen Changsheng and the dragon’s eyes met. Though its eyes on the surface seemed indifferent, he could faintly detect a fervent desire deep within.

Only then did he realize that this Black Dragon had been imprisoned underground for several hundred years, so this was its first visit to the surface in a long time.

Even though it was not truly free, it finally managed to leave.

After it left the underground space, the first thing it did was to find him.

After thinking it over for a long time, he finally said, “Fine, Zhizhi.”

Hearing this, the dragon’s eyes were as cold and proud as ever, yet it still gave a cry of ‘zhi zhi’.

Chen Changsheng knew that this was its way of laughing, and so he also laughed.

One after another, monolith viewers departed from the Mausoleum of Books. Added together with all the Ethereal Opening cultivators in the various schools and academies, as well as the teacher, more than a hundred people had assembled before the stone pillars of the Li Palace, preparing to set off on a journey to enter the Garden of Zhou.

There were even more cultivators that had already set off from different places all over the continent, or had already arrived at the Garden of Zhou.

An imperial carriage, pulled along by a pegasus, slowly proceeded along the Sacred Path. The carriage probably contained an important member of the Orthodoxy whose duty was to manage the journey to the Garden of Zhou.

Chen Changsheng looked at that imperial carriage, trying to guess which important figure was within, and why the Pope or the Archbishop had not sent someone to tell him who it was.

As he looked at the carriage, there were many people looking at him, because he had already become one of those important figures of the Orthodoxy. Chen Changsheng had no awareness of this. When the bishop of the Temple Seminary brought his three students to pay their respects, he could only stare blankly for a while before responding. Soon after, the groups from the Heavenly Dao Academy and the Li Palace Academy also came to pay their respects to him. Naturally not everyone paid respects to this fifteen-year-old youth willingly, but Chen Changsheng's status was so high, and it was right in front of the Li Palace. As members of

the Orthodoxy, none of them dared to show the slightest bit of disrespect.

Chen Changsheng had no experience with this sort of thing. He could only return their bows one by one. Thankfully, he still remembered the Archbishop's words. Besides the Pope and the Divine Empress, he did not need to give anyone a full bow, he did not need to lower his head. However, his movements were inevitably somewhat stiff and reserved, completely lacking the sort of presence that his status deserved.

Zhexiu expressionlessly stood by his side. He said nothing because he also had little experience with this sort of thing and would be of no help.

Liang Xiaoxiao, Qi Jian, as well as more than a dozen southern examinees of the Grand Examination stood on the opposite side, silently spectating.

When the group going to the Garden of Zhou left the capital, a melodious bell rang from the depths of the Li Palace.

Earlier, the red geese had flown off to some far away place.

The ranking of this year's Proclamation of Azure Clouds had officially been changed.

Xu Yourong, who had sat on the first place seat for so many years, was no longer amongst its ranks.

Luo Luo had become the new first place.

Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian had also departed from the Proclamation of Azure Clouds.

The Pavilion of Divination had also put forth a new Proclamation of Golden Distinction.

As expected, Qiushan Jun remained at the top of the ranking.

Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian also appeared on the rankings, as well as many of the other youths that had successfully broken through into Ethereal Opening in the Mausoleum of Books.

However, surprisingly, neither Xu Yourong nor Chen Changsheng could be found on the rankings. Gou Hanshi, Tang Thirty-Six and all the others, that still remained in the mausoleum, would not be evaluated by the Divining Elder, as per custom. However, Chen Changsheng had already left the mausoleum, while Xu Yourong had always been outside of it. Did they not appear on the Proclamation of Golden Distinction?

Chapter 243 - The Yellow Paper Umbrella

Every time the Pavilion of Divination issued a new ranking, it would always add a brief or a commentary. On this occasion, the Pavilion of Divination had probably guessed at the discussion that its decision would invite and they had also explained as to why Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng had not entered the Proclamation of Golden Distinction. It was made known that the Divining Elder looked forward to two's excursion to the Garden of Zhou.

At this point, the entire continent knew that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were entering the Garden of Zhou.

Ever since last year's Ivy Festival, the story of Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong's engagement had already spread across the entire world. This story was full of gratitude and grudges, childhood friendships, twists and turns. It was a story filled with turmoil, and its ending was hard to predict. Now, the lead actor and actress of this story would meet in the Garden of Zhou. This naturally caught the attention of countless people.

The other lead role in this story, Qiushan Jun, had not appeared, but his juniors were present. The gaze that Liang Xiaoxiao aimed at Chen Changsheng became increasingly cold. Qi Jian's impressions of Chen Changsheng had changed somewhat because of what had happened in the Mausoleum of Books. Now when he heard the following discussion, his small face flushed with indignation.

“Even if he gets lucky once more in the Garden of Zhou, how can he possibly seize first place on the Proclamation of Golden Distinction? How can he possibly be discussed on the same terms

as Qiushan Jun?”

“And why not? Although Qiushan Jun is already at Star Condensation, don’t forget that Qiushan Jun is four years older than him.”

Although this discussion did not bring up Chen Changsheng’s name, everyone knew that he was the subject.

Ye Xiaolian stood with her senior at the edge of the crowd, looking at Chen Changsheng’s back. Her eyes no longer had that loathing and anger that she first had, they only had some curiosity.

Chen Changsheng felt the gazes coming from all around him, especially the ill will from the southerners. He felt a huge pressure, and yet he also felt somewhat frustrated. In the eyes of the people, he and Xu Yourong were possibly childhood sweethearts. Perhaps they had a love-hate relationship. Only Chen Changsheng knew that none of this was true. He did not even know what Xu Yourong looked like, nor did he believe that Xu Yourong had any impression of him.

Departing from the south gate of the capital, the convoy took a break after a short while. Priest Xin descended from that carriage at the very front that was being pulled by the pegasus and walked towards Chen Changsheng.

Surprised, Chen Changsheng asked, “Could it be that His Eminence is in charge of the convoy?”

Priest Xin shook his head. “His Eminence’s health has not been too good lately.”

Chen Changsheng looked curiously at that imperial carriage in the front. “Which important figure of the Orthodoxy is in that carriage then?”

Priest Xin smiled at him. “I was just about to invite Your Eminence to board the carriage.”

Chen Changsheng was stunned, only after a while did he come to. Almost not daring to ask, he said, “Are you saying... on this journey to the Garden of Zhou, I’m the one in charge?”

Priest Xin firmly said, “Yes, His Holiness has handed this matter over to Your Eminence.”

Chen Changsheng thought back to the scene of those priests and teachers from the Temple Seminary and Heavenly Dao Academy coming to pay their respects and silently thought to himself, perhaps he had been the last one to know.

Leaving the capital, the convoy arrived at Wenshui city. The dozen or so carriages passed through the city gates one by one, each carriage bearing the crest of the Li Palace. The Orthodoxy in the city had been informed several days ago and they had made some arrangements. The guards at the city gates did not dare perform any inspections and they had long ago opened the gates. Both sides of the official road were crowded to the bursting point with spectators.

“Who is Chen Changsheng?”

“How many of the Divine State’s Seven Laws have come?”

“Phoenix Xu directly departed from the South River Temple, so she shouldn’t be in this group right?”

“Which carriage is Chen Changsheng in? Could he be in the first carriage? Oh! Look at how white that pegasus’s wings are... it’s about the same as the cotton bedding in our house.”

The crowd passionately discussed as they pointed at the convoy. The beautiful and mystical white pegasus was naturally the focus of their gazes. Of course, when the crowd realized that Chen Changsheng really was in the first carriage, they surged forward. The street suddenly became very noisy and teeming with people. Time and time again, one could hear cries of his name from the crowd.

A daoist youth from Xining Village, versed in the Daoist Canon. First rank of the first banner in the Grand Examination. In the Mausoleum of Books, he comprehended all seventeen monoliths of the front mausoleum in one day. Now, this youth had become the Principal of the Orthodox Academy.

No matter what angle it was looked at, this was all the stuff of legends. He was a legend.

Innumerable gazes rested on that carriage, their eyes burning with fervor, like that curtain across the window was going to burn to ash.

Even though Chen Changsheng had a similar experience moving through the streets of the capital after the Grand Examination, he still was not used to this sort of treatment, so he felt like his face was on fire.

Contrarily, Zhexiu who sat across him was as apathetic as ever. He seemed to be affected in the least by the noise from the outside, nor by the fiery gazes.

The convoy directly headed to the headquarters of the Orthodoxy in Wenshui City. Several of Priest Xin's subordinate priests went to make arrangements. As the Principal of the Orthodox Academy and head of the convoy, Chen Changsheng was naturally not required to handle these things on his own. To phrase it another manner, he occupied a similar position as the door gods who stuck on the doors.

The Orthodoxy had already prepared rooms for their stay, and the various cultivators split up into their respective rooms. In the past few years, the Mount Li Sword Sect's reputation had resounded throughout the world, so Qi Jian and Liang Xiaoxiao were able to stay in the eastern courtyard. The two girls from the Holy Maiden Peak were their neighbors. Chen Changsheng naturally had the best accommodations. The bishop of Wenshui City enthusiastically invited him into the main hall while Zhexiu followed silently.

After a simple bath and arranging his luggage, Chen Changsheng was prepared to rest when a priest came to inform him that somebody had come to pay their respects to Principal Chen.

After a moment surprise, Chen Changsheng guessed who that person was and he quickly changed into a clean set of clothes and walked out towards the front of the hall.

A man who looked like a steward stood in front of the hall. His clothes were rather plain. On his waist was tied a piece of jade that was absolutely not ordinary.

When that steward saw Chen Changsheng, he bowed with the utmost respect.

Seeing this scene, the priests of Wenshui city were extremely shocked.

The Wenshui Tangs had always been arrogant, such that they did not even respect the Tianhai clan or the Qiushan clan. On a normal day, this steward would not even give face to the bishop. So why was he so humble towards Chen Changsheng? It must be known that the position of Principal of the Orthodox Academy was an empty office. His status only had value in the Orthodoxy. Even if Chen Changsheng had a good relationship with the Tang clan's sole grandson, that still did not warrant such respect.

Chen Changsheng apologized to that steward of the Tang clan, "Logically, this one is a member of the junior generation. No matter what, I should go and pay my respects to the Old Master of

the Tang clan. It is just that this time the pace of journey is too rapid. In addition, His Holiness has put me in charge of this convoy, so it is inconvenient for me to leave. I ask the steward to give my regards to the Old Master.”

Saying this, he took out a small box that he had prepared in the capital and handed it over.

Inside this box was medicine. It was made up of the rare medicine and fruits that he and Tang Thirty-Six had stolen from the Hundred Herb Garden, as well as the rarely seen local specialties of the Red River provided by Luoluo. The priests of the Li Palace had refined these plants into pills. Besides the pills that had been used to assist in breaking through to Ethereal Opening, there still many pills left. While they were probably not very useful for cultivation, they were quite excellent for strengthening one's physical constitution and extending one's life.

Thanking him repeatedly, the steward took the box. Afterwards, he took a box from his bosom and offered it to Chen Changsheng with both hands. He said that it was a gift from the Old Master to commemorate their first meeting, then the steward took his leave.

Returning to his quiet and secluded room in the main hall, Chen Changsheng placed that small box on the table. Upon opening it, all he saw that there was a metal ball inside. This metal ball was about the size of a fist, yet it seemed extraordinarily heavy. Its surface was extremely glossy. The ball was covered with lines like those between fish scales that divided the metal ball into three parts.

Zhexiu walked over to the edge of the table and glanced at the ball, then his expression subtly changed and he said nothing for a long time.

Chen Changsheng asked, "What's wrong? You seem to be very surprised."

Zhexiu looked over at him and said, "Just what is your relationship with Tang Thirty-Six?"

Confused, Chen Changsheng replied, "We're friends."

Yes, Tang Thirty-Six was the first friend that he made after entering the capital.

"If you were just friends, would the Tang clan hand over such a precious treasure to you?" Zhexiu expressionlessly asked.

Chen Changsheng grabbed that seemingly ordinary and unremarkable metal ball and carefully examined, but he could find nothing special about it.

"What is this thing?"

Zhexiu walked in front of him and looked at the metal ball. His normally emotionless eyes seemed to glow with a strange light.

In every city of every country in the human world, the defensive

spell formations were all created by the Tang clan. The best weapons for their soldiers were created by the Tang clan. The armors of every one of the thirty-eight Divine Generals were all created by the Tang clan. It was even said that the reason that the Red River wound its way around the White Emperor City was because an ancestor of the Tang family personally designed it.

Along the banks of the Wenshui, this clan had persisted for a thousand generations. They had so much money that even the Divine Empress was afraid of laying hands upon them.

If this was a treasure of the Wenshui Tangs, it would no doubt be no ordinary treasure.

Zhexiu said, “Of the one hundred divine artifacts of the Tier of Legendary Weapons, at the very least, seventeen of them were made by the Tang family. Although they can still make unusual weapons, because of the lack of rare ores, those weapon can no longer match up to those divine weapons, but their skill in design is unchanged from the past. All those legendary weapons have mostly been hidden away by the various sects and schools, or like the Frost God Spear, locked away in the Imperial Palace. Thus, the experts of this era most desire weapons created by the Tang family, so not even a crazy fool like Xiao Zhang would dare offend the Tangs.’

Chen Changsheng suddenly felt that the metal ball in his palm had gotten much heavier.

Zhexiu continued, “If I’m not seeing things wrong, that metal ball in your hands is the Yellow Paper Umbrella.”

Chen Changsheng repeated the name in surprise. “Yellow Paper Umbrella?”

He faintly remembered hearing this name before.

“Right. In the past, Mount Li Sword Sect’s Junior Martial Uncle Su had ordered a magical artifact from the Tang clan. After amending the original design, the Tang clan needed thirty years to create the weapon. That magical artifact is that metal ball in your hands. Its name is the Yellow Paper Umbrella.”

“Is that the martial uncle that Gou Hanshi and the rest always mentioned? ... Since it was that legendary expert that ordered this tool, why is it still in the Tang family?”

“Because at the end, Junior Martial Uncle Su didn’t come to take it.”

“Why?”

“Because... he couldn’t afford it.”

The room was silent.

Chen Changsheng felt like the metal ball had grown even heavier. Even his voice became nervous. “This item... is very expensive?”

Zhexiu replied, “The Yellow Paper Umbrella was a name dubbed by the Old Master of the Tang clan himself.”

Chen Changsheng was mystified as to the meaning behind that.

“[Yellow paper](#) is paper money.”

(TN: Paper money is fake money that is usually burned during rituals.)

Chen Changsheng understood. The paper money was different from the silver notes circulating in the world. Any value could be written on paper money.

If the number written on the paper money was made real, how much money would that be?

Outside of the Tang family, was there anyone in the world that had that much money?

No wonder that legendary Junior Martial Uncle of Mount Li, who personally ordered the weapon, could only reluctantly give it up in the end.

This Yellow Paper Umbrella would cause the everyone in the world to feel poor.

Yet now it lay in his hands.

Chapter 244 - Outside The Garden Of Zhou, A Storm Comes (Part One)

“Although no one has ever seen the Yellow Paper Umbrella with their own eyes, this umbrella is extremely famous. There are even some people in the Pavilion of Divination that say that if the Tier of Legendary Weapons was ever revised, amongst the various famous weapons and tools of this era, this umbrella is most qualified to enter the Tier.”

Zhexiu continued, “Don’t say that you and Tang Thirty-Six are friends... even if we considered that you are the new Principal of the Orthodox Academy and Tang Thirty-Six is a student of the Orthodox Academy, the Tang clan still wouldn’t need to use this umbrella to win your favor. Not to mention... the Tang clan has never bribed or curried the favor of anyone.”

Recalling those angry words that Tang Thirty-Six had said back at the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng felt that they were correct. Regardless of if it was the Heavenly Dao Academy or the Temple Seminary, a third of their expenditures were paid by the Wenshui Tangs every year. Even if the Old Master’s most precious grandson was a student of the Orthodox Academy, he still did not need to show such special care.

However, just at this moment, Chen Changsheng began to think of something else.

“If that Junior Martial Uncle were to see this magical artifact, which he had spent such painstaking effort on, appear in the hands of a junior like me, would he be unhappy?”

“If it were you, would you be unhappy?”

“Of course.”

“So, he will also be unhappy.”

“Then... would he steal or even kill somebody for it?”

“Stop thinking that your seniors are all so reckless. In addition, back there in front of the hall, how could any of those priests imagine that the Tang Family’s Old Master would give you the Yellow Paper Umbrella as a commemorative gift? As long as the Tang clan says nothing and you say nothing, who will know?”

“You know.”

“But fine, since it’s such a potent magical artifact, in the future, there will be definitely be a time where I have to use it.”

“When that time comes, we’ll talk about it.”

“I’m just afraid that on the day I do use it, what if I provoke the Mount Li Sword Sect?”

“The Ivy Festival, the Grand Examination, your engagement with Xu Yourong... haven’t you provoked them enough?”

“That’s true. The next problem is... how do you use this Yellow Paper Umbrella?”

Zhexiu thought about it, then said, “Try pouring your true essence into it.”

That was the most common method of using a magical artifact.

Chen Changsheng complied with these instructions and he slowly sent a wisp of his true essence into the metal ball.

As he sent true essence into the ball, the ball sent back a sort of wondrous feeling into his sea of consciousness.

Within the metal ball, he sensed an undulating surface, like countless hills.

Using his eyes, it was very clear that the outside of the metal ball was very smooth, so these undulations should be on the inside of the ball.

His true essence slowly followed the contours of the hills, finally arriving at the central area of the ball.

A flash of brilliant light sparkled there, like thunder and lightning, or like a star coming into being.

A gentle breeze rose up in the hall. The metal ball in his palms trembled as the lines on its surface split apart.

Accompanied by metallic clacks, the opening metal ball underwent endless transformations, constantly reforming itself.

Several metallic membranes, which formed the canopy of an umbrella, appeared.

That was closely followed by the shaft, and then the handle.

Not long after, an umbrella had appeared in Chen Changsheng's hands.

From the canopy to the handle, the entire umbrella was constructed of metal. It practically shined in his hands, like a piece of silver that had just come out of a furnace.

The gentle breeze continued to circulate around the hall.

Soon after, something happened which made both Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu very worried.

When the gentle breeze touched the bright metal surface, it began to change. Some places on the umbrella turned black, while other places on the umbrella turned dark. In a few breaths of time, the formerly shiny surface had become mottled all over. It was like it was constructed from plain oil paper then submerged in layers and layers of dust, making it extraordinarily filthy.

“What happened?” Chen Changsheng nervously asked.

Even the handle he was grasping had turned black and old, like it was made of wood.

“Don’t panic yet.”

As he saw the umbrella change, Zhexiu was also shocked at first, then he calmed down. However, his eyes seemed to grow brighter and brighter.

He thrust out his hand to Chen Changsheng and asked, “Let me use your dagger for a moment.”

Chen Changsheng glanced at the dagger on his waist, then shook his head. This was a treasure gifted to him by the Old Master of the Tang family, there was no way that he could have it be slashed at.

“Even Qiushan Jun’s Dragonscale Sword would probably be unable to scratch this umbrella.”

Zhexiu expressionlessly said, but he did not push the matter. Instead, he lifted his right and said, “Hold the umbrella tight, I’m going to attack it with all my might.”

Chen Changsheng hurriedly grabbed the handle tight. Just as he had done this, he saw Zhexiu send his fist flying towards him.

After breaking into Ethereal Opening in the Mausoleum of Books, Zhexiu was much stronger now than he had been at the Grand Examination.

Chen Changsheng could only see several straight line piercing through the air and heading directly at his face.

For a split second, Chen Changsheng could even faintly make out the knife-like claws at the heads of those lines.

He even felt like Zhexiu really wanted to kill him.

However, at this moment, it was too late for him to do anything but tightly hold onto the umbrella.

Swish.

The handle of the umbrella slightly trembled.

Suspended in the air in front of him were five distinct scratches, but then the scratches slowly dissipated.

He had a vague understanding that the powerful force that Zhexiu had directed at him had been completely absorbed by the fluctuating Qi that hung on the edges of the umbrella. Then by some sort of method or by some mysterious means, the energy had all been set down into the ground, dissipating the force so much

that Chen Changsheng did not even feel the slightest aftershock.

It truly was worthy of being a magical artifact that even the Junior Martial Uncle of Mount Li was unable to afford.

The defensive capabilities of the Yellow Paper Umbrella were truly too powerful.

Zhexiu watched in silence as his claw marks slowly disappeared from the invisible curtain hanging under the edge of the umbrella.

Chen Changsheng asked, “Is that it?”

Zhexiu indifferently replied, “Is that not enough?”

Chen Changsheng replied, “Since this umbrella was so famous... I thought it would be much more impressive.”

Zhexiu replied, “Solely with regards to defense, this umbrella can resist the attack of a Star Condensation expert. That’s already pretty impressive.”

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, even if your talent is exceptional and you can not be compared to the average Ethereal Opening cultivator, is it not taking it a bit too far to put your attack on par with that of a Star Condensation cultivator?

Even though he thought this, he naturally did not say it out loud.

He thought of something else and asked, “Do you think that this umbrella perhaps has another use?”

Zhexiu replied, “I don’t know.”

Chen Changsheng said, “Maybe I should go and ask the Tang Old Master.”

This umbrella had already become an extremely unremarkable item, just like any other shabby old umbrella.

Zhexiu looked at the umbrella in Chen Changsheng’s hand, then after a moment of silence, he replied, “It’s very obvious that this is the first time that this umbrella has been opened since it was constructed, I think... not even the Tang’s Old Master would understand all the abilities of this umbrella. If you really wanted to know, I think the only way would be to ask that Junior Martial Uncle.”

Chen Changsheng decided to end the discussion there, then he stimulated his true essence through the umbrella handle to collapse the umbrella. With the clashing of metal, the umbrella furled in upon itself so quickly that it left after images. In the end, it returned to being a metal ball resting in his palm, but it no longer possessed its shiny luster. Now, it looked like a pebble that had been freshly excavated from the dirt.

Northwest of Wenshui City lay the Qin Mountains.

The Qin Mountains extended for one thousand li. From its northeast foothills flowed a great river. On both sides of that river, there was an endless expanse of fertile land. This was Tianliang County.

Chen Changsheng's destination was very far from this place, separated by many miles from the capital of Tianliang. However, the great families of Tianliang's capital had long ago sent countless experts to surround the city.

That was because this year, the Garden of Zhou was appearing in Tianliang County's Hanqiu City.

The Garden of Zhou was a miniature world. It opened once every ten years, and each time it appeared in a different place. Sometimes, it appeared in Jiangnan, other times in Dongshan. Sometimes it would appear in the snowy plains, sometimes it would be at the edge of the capital, or right outside Xuelao City. Twice, it had even appeared in the great ocean that lay between the Great Western Continent and the continent.

The fleet of carriages that had come from the capital arrived in Hanqiu City at dusk. Only one night remained before the Garden of Zhou would formally open.

Considering all the various Ethereal Opening cultivators from across the continent along with their teachers and seniors, there was at least several hundred people waiting in Hanqiu City for the opening of the Garden of Zhou.

For many people, this last night seemed particularly long. Many young cultivators could not bear to stay holed up in the inns and they had long left, going to a forest right outside the city.

Behind the forest, one could see white-capped snowy peaks, burning in the twilight. However, there was nothing else to see.

The youthful cultivators whispered to each other while viewing the twilight, but none of them dared approach that forest.

That was because right outside the forest, there were several grass huts, and in these grass huts sat several powerful individuals.

Sitting (坐) in these huts, suppressing (镇) everyone with their might, these were the overseers (坐镇).

Those overseeing the Garden of Zhou this year included one of the archbishops of the Sacred Halls, two Divine Generals of the Great Zhou, and an elder of the Longevity Sect.

Yet, what made those young cultivators the most afraid of approaching that forest was the person sitting in the most forward hut.

In the hut sat a middle-aged man, his long hair spilling over his shoulders. His bearing was relaxed and easy going, yet he looked around with an extremely cold expression.

Those cultivators from Hanqiu City paid their respects from a distance, full of reverence. Yet the middle-aged man paid them no mind.

No one had any sort of objection to this.

That was because the middle-aged man was the Sect Master of World-Severing Sect, and also the master of Tianliang County's Zhu clan.

The greatest noble family of Tianliang was of course the Chen clan of the imperial family of Zhou.

However, the Chen Imperial Clan currently resided in the capital. Ever since Wang Po's Wang clan had declined in power, the Zhu clan became the de facto premier family of Tianliang County.

Of course, this man's status in the cultivation world was even more heaven-shaking.

That was because he was Zhu Luo of the Eight Storms of the Cardinal Directions.

The Solitary Drunk Under the Moon, Zhu Luo.

The Five Saints, the Eight Storms of the Cardinal Directions and the members of the Proclamation of Liberation were considered to be the pinnacle of experts on the continent.

Compared to the Five Saints, the Eight Storms did not have as much secular influence, but in terms of cultivation, they could not be considered to be weak.

The expert was known as the Solitary Drunk Under the Moon not because he was addicted to alcohol, but because three hundred years ago, he traveled to the distant snowy plains in the north. There, outside Xuelao City, he saw the moon with his own eyes and composed a poem. After he composed this poem, he demonstrated the power of the Saint Realm by beheading the number two Demon General with one blow, shocking the world.

Thus, the World-Severing Sect cultivated severing the emotions and exterminating one's nature.

The poem that he composed under the moon had a line, "To drink alone is to have no relations."

Everyone knew that this expert's temper was not very good.

As a result, no one dared to approach his hut.

Even the pegasus seemed to sense the cold and frightful pressure emanating from that grass hut and it lowered its head in acknowledgement.

Chen Changsheng caressed its wings to console it, then he looked in silence at the slim yet tyrannical figure of the man in the hut.

Some people took notice of the crest of the Li Palace on the carriages and they guessed at who was in them. The quiet scene gradually began to grow noisy. One could faintly hear some people whispering, which one was Chen Changsheng? In the dim light of the twilight, the snow white color of the Pegasus stood out. Many people looked over and thought to themselves, can it be that this unremarkable youth is that person?

At this time, a cold voice came out of the hut. “So you are Chen Changsheng?”

Chapter 245 - Outside The Garden Of Zhou, A Storm Comes (Part Two)

So you are Chen Changsheng? He is Chen Changsheng? Who is Chen Changsheng? From the Ivy Festival, or to be more precise, from the time that the news of his engagement with Xu Yourong spread to the entire continent, these were the three phrases that Chen Changsheng had heard the most often. As time passed, this situation had not improved one bit. Contrarily, as his name became more and more famous, there were times where he was not sure who he was.

The curiosity of humans was not too different from a cat's. Not even the Divine Empress could block up the mouths of all the people in the world. Ever since he had begun to hear those comments and see those gazes filled with nervousness and caution, he had slowly become silent and numb to them. Only now he was unable to treat this as he had done before, because the man who had asked the question was Zhu Luo, the Solitary Drunk Under the Moon. He was a powerful personage that even the Li Palace had to treat with extreme courtesy.

He took several steps forward and bowed to that distant grass hut, dignified and orderly.

The peace and quiet gradually began to grow restless. Many pairs of eyes fell upon his body.

Chen Changsheng's expression was calm, but how could he be calm? When he thought about that scene in Wenshui City, or how on the road some people would flatter him while others would give

him a cool eye, he felt extremely helpless. He began to have the feeling that being famous really was not that fortunate after all. How could Xu Yourong have borne this for so many years?

Compared to liveliness of the capital and Wenshui City, the crowd outside the forest was much faster in calming down. Zhu Luo was asking a question to Chen Changsheng, who would dare to disturb them?

The Eight Storms of the Cardinal Directions stood at the peak of human experts. In terms of strength, they were not necessarily below the Five Saints. Although the opening of the Garden of Zhou was very important, it was enough for just Zhu Luo to be overseeing it. With one of the world's most powerful experts here, unless the Demon Lord or Black Robe personally came, there would be no problems.

Zhu Luo did not look at Chen Changsheng. Instead, he looked at the snowy peak. In the twilight, his long hair that fell to his shoulders seemed to blaze with that snowy peak. It made him give off an especially wild feeling.

“Has Mei Lisha gone senile? He actually let a child like you become Principal of the Orthodox Academy.”

Hearing these words, it became even more quiet. Many people turned towards Chen Changsheng, their eyes showing all sort of expressions. Some had pity, but naturally there was also scorn and pleasure in his misery.

Even though he had performed that great merit of summoning the starlight in the Mausoleum of Books, in the end, he was only fifteen. To become the Principal of the Orthodox Academy at such an age, this decision had been discussed and censured all across the world. It was just nobody dared to oppose the Pope's decision in public

Even though Zhu Luo was a member of the Eight Storms, not even he would defy the Pope's will in public. So although he said Mei Lisha, everyone knew who he was really talking about.

Mei Lisha was the archbishop of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education and one of the Six Prefects of the Orthodoxy. His position had a similar status to that of Zhu Luo's. Zhu Luo's taunting words were not necessarily provoking the Orthodoxy, nor was it bullying a weak child.

Priest Xin walked over to Chen Changsheng and whispered a few sentences into his ear. Only then did Chen Changsheng know that as master of the Tianliang's second most powerful family, he had built a very close relationship with the imperial family of Chen over the past several hundred years. Because the Divine Empress had ascended to the throne and suppressed the imperial family, this peerless expert's relationships took a turn for the worse and his relationship with the Li Palace became cold. On the other hand, he was very close with the Orthodoxy's conservative faction which Mei Lisha represented, and he was old friends with Mei Lisha. Reasonably, he should have been looking after Chen Changsheng.

Why did this supreme expert say these words which made things difficult for Chen Changsheng?

Chen Changsheng seriously pondered this question, then he realized that Zhu Luo was jeering at the archbishop, not him. Regardless of his age, status, or strength, he was obviously a child in Zhu Luo's eyes.

To the world, the Orthodox Academy had fallen into ruin long ago. Chen Changsheng was its principal in name only. Perhaps they did not know that the academy, deep within the Hundred Flowers Lane, only had three students? However, to a worthy senior like Zhu Luo, this was a far cry from the Orthodox Academy of old. Under the leadership of that principal, the Orthodox Academy of the past could be considered to have limitless potential. Not even the current Mount Li Sword Sect could compare. Seeing that Chen Changsheng had actually been made the principal of this academy, Zhu Luo naturally felt somewhat sorrowful or even uneasy. For such a powerful person as he, not even he could imagine that the words he had said without thinking would place such great pressure on Chen Changsheng, and such great expectation in the minds of the spectators.

The crowd was silent as they looked at Chen Changsheng, waiting for his answer to Zhu Luo's question. Some were scornful, some took pity on him, but very few people were worried about him. Just at this moment, Chen Changsheng recalled the words that the Pope had said to him during the Grand Examination's announcement of the ranking—lower your head, so that I might crown you.

Upon which he made a slight bow, then lowered his head.

He paid his respects once more to Zhu Luo, not saying anything, then returned to the carriage.

What was this? Was it disregard? The scene once again grew restless. They all thought that Chen Changsheng was about to meet with tragedy for offending Zhu Luo. Everyone knew that amongst the continent's peak experts, Zhu Luo's temperament was the harshest. How would he discipline Chen Changsheng?

Against all their expectations, Zhu Luo was not angry, nor did he say anything. Using two of his fingers, he brought up a flask of wine to his lips and took a drink, then he looked up in silence at the gradually emerging stars.

The words that he had said were for the Li Palace, for Mei Lisha, and also for the Pope. He wanted to make his dissatisfaction known, but none of his words had ever been directed at Chen Changsheng.

Naturally, Chen Changsheng did not need to answer.

To not answer turned out to be the best answer.

Priest Xin wiped the sweat off his forehead, then softly asked Chen Changsheng, "Enter the city to rest?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "I won't enter Hanqiu City. Just waiting in the carriage is fine."

The seemingly endless night tranquilly passed. With the coming of the dawn, people emerged one after another from the official road. Even more people hurried over from Hanqiu City.

Under the protection of several dozen priests, Mei Lisha arrived, at which point Chen Changsheng realized that this venerable elder was supervising the opening of the Garden of Zhou. However, he wondered when Mei Lisha had arrived, and why did he not travel together with them? The cultivators of the various sects and schools all had different reactions when seeing Mei Lisha. Some of them thought back to the words that Zhu Luo had said last night and subconsciously turned towards that grass hut.

The light spring wind breezed through the grass hut, ruffling Zhu Luo's sleeve. Zhu Luo's eyes were closed, his body leaning against the fence. It seemed like he had drunk himself into intoxication and he was unwilling to awaken.

Mei Lisha looked over and he could only smile and shake his head. Afterwards, he indicated that the ceremony to enter the garden should begin.

Every ten years, the Garden of Zhou would open once. It would remain open for one hundred days. After these one hundred days had passed, everyone had to exit, or else risk being torn to pieces by the changes and chaos occurring in the Garden of Zhou. This was an iron law that had been verified many times in the past. The Garden of Zhou possibly contained Zhou Dufu's legacy. It would also contain the legacy of all those experts that had been defeated by Zhou Dufu. This was a truth that had already been affirmed.

To enter the Garden of Zhou could be said to be going on an adventure, and it could also be called a trial by fire. For this reason, the rules which humanity established for the Garden of Zhou were very simple. No matter who was the one that picked up a treasure or technique in the Garden of Zhou, that item would belong to the sect or school of whichever cultivator managed to successfully take it out of the Garden of Zhou. Stealing was permitted in the Garden of Zhou, and any other methods except killing were allowed.

In the past, there were people that asked, were these rules not too cruel and violent? The Pavilion of Divination, which had been entrusted by the Saints with devising these rules, gave the following explanation: if bitter encounters and the spilling of blood could not be had in the Garden of Zhou, then in the future, when confronting those callous and murder-loving Demon experts, they would still die. Why squander the resources? If humanity wanted to continue existing on this continent, then they must be a little heartless to the younger generation, which would bear such heavy responsibility.

As the priest explaining the rules delivered a solemn warning to the cultivators entering the Garden of Zhou, even more priests registered the names of the cultivators in books and distributed cloth bags. In these cloth bags were two items: a flowing water bottle to keep track of time and a gray string.

There were some people that did not understand why the flowing water bottle was necessary to keep track of time. Even if the sun and the stars in the Garden of Zhou were impossible to use for calculating the true date, they were nonetheless Ethereal Opening cultivators that would never count the days wrong. As for the gray string, everyone was very clear on its use. If one encountered an

unconquerable danger in the Garden of Zhou, they found their harvest to be satisfactory, or no longer wanted to continue their exploration; they only needed to light that gray string and they would be automatically sent to the Garden of Zhou's gate.

Zhu Luo would stand guard outside the Garden of Zhou — the human world had no moonlight. He could only drink alone under the starlight. Regardless of how dead drunk he was, as long as people could see him, they felt safe.

While Chen Changsheng listened to the priest explain the rules and took the bag that Priest Xin had gave him, his mind was elsewhere. His eyes somewhat nervously moved about the crowd.

The senior from Holy Maiden Peak as well as Ye Xiaolan had journeyed together with him. Now, the two women stood together with several other girls. They were probably their fellow disciples from Holy Maiden Peak. He very seriously looked around very seriously, but he did not find anyone that looked like her — He had never met her before, but he heard that she was extremely beautiful. He should have been able to tell who she was at a glance.

Had Xu Yourong come or not? If she had come, then where was she?

The morning light gradually flourished, yet the fog did not disperse. In that space between the forest and mountains, the fog only grew thicker. The light of the morning sun was dispersed in that fog, transforming into all sorts of strange lines.

Suddenly, a cry of alarm arose from the crowd.

As the crowd looked into the fog, they saw a small bridge faintly come into being. Under bridge was flowing water. They saw a gallery, and at the corner of this gallery sat an old plumtree. This quiet and secluded beauty seemed to be one side of a garden.

Was this the Garden of Zhou?

This quiet garden amidst the fog seemed to be both fake and real at the same time.

It was like a mirage.

The instance the Garden of Zhou appeared, Zhu Luo opened his eyes.

He turned towards the quiet garden within the mountains, and a complex swirl of emotions bubbled up in his eyes as he began to think about many things.

His hand rested on the fence, constantly patting it.

Mei Lisha also opened his eyes. Slowly, he said, “Go, and do not lose yourselves in greed and forget the time.”

Chapter 246 - Outside The Garden Of Zhou, A Storm Comes (Part Three)

As Mei Lisha said these words, he looked at the several hundred cultivators that were prepared to enter the Garden of Zhou. All of these cultivators were at Ethereal Opening, as such, they were already considered experts. None of them were that old. It could be said that these several hundred Ethereal Opening cultivators were the future of humanity.

Chen Changsheng stood amongst these several hundred people. He understood that the archbishop's words were directed at him and slightly nodded his head in understanding. Afterwards, he followed the crowd in entering the forest.

The forest at dawn was extremely peaceful and quiet. Perhaps it was because of the appearance of the Garden of Zhou, not even the twittering of birds could be heard. The only sound was that of the rustling produced as people stepped on the fallen leaves.

Not too much later, the several hundred cultivators arrived at where the fog was thickest. The faintly discernible quiet garden in the fog had become clearer. It seemed to be right in front of their eyes, yet it also seemed to be at the ends of the earth.

Many cultivators had gradually begun to sense that this fog was filled with a rich energy, similar to the radiance of the stars, and even more similar to the energy contained in the crystals. The cultivators could not absorb this energy directly, but it provided enormous benefits, greatly assisting in calming their souls.

However, the fog instead concealed a hidden danger deep within. Those cultivators with good eyesight could faintly make out that outside that real and yet illusory garden, and the extremely short and thick bolts of lightning that flashed before disappearing.

The priests from the Orthodoxy and the teachers and seniors from the various sects and schools all remained outside the fog, not taking a single step forward. Perhaps that lightning flashes in the fog had some responses to cultivators above Ethereal Opening, which could bring about some disastrous consequence.

This was already the outer garden of the Garden of Zhou.

There were several hundred cultivators from the schools and sects of the north and south as well as several dozen loose cultivators and shamans. Despite their numbers, the fog-covered woods were very quiet. No one spoke a word.

All these people were waiting for the Garden of Zhou to open.

Every ten years, the Garden of Zhou would appear once. Each time it appeared, it would open for exactly one hundred days. However, that did not mean that its appearance would necessarily be sensed by humans. In the past few decades, it had not appeared once.

That the Garden of Zhou would appear this year outside Hanqiu City was also not something that the humans had discovered. Rather, it had been that enigmatic advisor of the Demon Race,

Black Robe, that had confirmed this. Fortunately, a subordinate of Black Robe's had attempted and failed to assassinate Luoluo in the Orthodox Academy. As he was reluctant to die and had not been allowed to commit suicide, Xue Xingchuan had been able to capture him alive. Afterwards, Zhou Tong used his unparalleled methods of torture to extract information, actually finding a spy organization that Black Robe had planted in the human society. Following this trail of clues, Zhou Tong was able to discover the location and time at which the Garden of Zhou would open.

To control the Garden of Zhou, the most important matter was not its location. The most important matter was to hold the key to the Garden of Zhou. In that period of time in which the common people were not aware of the opening of the Garden of Zhou, the Demons had sent several experts at the upper level of Ethereal Opening to Hanqiu City with the intent of snatching the key beforehand. Humanity, also knowing about the opening of the Garden of Zhou, feigned ignorance, yet in reality, they also sent people to quietly infiltrate the outer garden of the Garden of Zhou. To hide from the attention of the Demons and noiselessly steal the key, humanity had sent only one person.

For such an important matter, the Five Saints themselves made the decision. The person they sent was Qiushan Jun — Whether it was the humans, the demons, or the demi-humans, in the Ethereal Opening realm, Mount Li's eldest martial brother was without equal.

Qiushan Jun's situation seemed to be rather perilous, but in fact, his success was not at all a surprise. He had suffered a heavy injury for it, but he had used it as an opportunity and became the world's youngest Star Condensation cultivator.

The world had just begun to admit that Chen Changsheng had the qualifications to be compared on the same footing with Qiushan Jun. However, obtaining the first rank of the First Banner in the Grand Examination was an event that happened every year, whereas obtaining the key to the Garden of Zhou was a momentous event could only occur once in a decade. Ignoring the difference between Star Condensation and Ethereal Opening, the most important fact was that Qiushan Jun had battled against the demons to obtain the glory. Even if Chen Changsheng's performance had been even more world-shaking, it would still be a matter in the human world. The significance of the two events were completely different. If Chen Changsheng had not viewed the entire front mausoleum in one day and then been appointed as Principal of the Orthodox Academy, then perhaps his image would have been even more lost in Qiushan Jun's shadow.

In this brief period of time before the Garden of Zhou opened, many people subconsciously looked at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng paid no attention to these matters. His mind was still on Xu Yourong. He had confirmed that Xu Yourong was not amongst these several hundred cultivators, and this fact for some reason made him feel much more relaxed. According to the records in the Daoist Canon, there were some cultivators who would choose to wait a few days before entering the Garden of Zhou. Xu Yourong was probably following such a plan, but why did she want to purposefully arrive late? Was it because she wanted to avoid those passionate and adoring gazes, or was it because she wanted to avoid him?

That aside, how would the Garden of Zhou open?

The key that Qiushan Jun had obtained was probably handed over to Mount Li, yet the only senior expert to come to the Garden of Zhou was an elder from the Longevity Sect. There was no representative from Mount Li.

Chen Changsheng stood at the front of the crowd thinking, watching as the lightning threw the space in front of him into turmoil, seeing that sometimes close and sometimes far garden.

Just at this moment, a rainbow fell from the sky.

The origin of this rainbow was a mystery. It fell from high in the sky and fell through the fog to land in front of them.

When the rainbow touched the lightning flashing in the fog and the turbulent air, it caused them to gradually dissolve into nothingness.

The fog also began to lift, allowing the scene behind the fog to become much clearer.

In front of that small bridge and gallery, a whitewashed wall began to appear.

In that wall, and in front of the hundreds of cultivators, a round arched gate appeared.

On the board above the arched door were inscribed two words: Ethereal Opening (通幽).

Behind the arched gate was a limestone path, its surface covered with light moss. Further along, the path bended into the depths of the fog. There were overhanging eaves joined together as well as many points of scenery.

Standing in the forest, it was impossible to take in all the scenery at a glance.

The scenery's end lay behind the wall.

[A winding path leads to Ethereal Opening. Who once maintained the Garden of Zhou?](#)

(TN: The line is a reference to a Chinese poem where 通幽处 means secluded place)

The fog gradually dispersed and the scenery became more real. The water vapor gradually condensed, leading to the pitter patter of rain.

The spring wind blew the rain into Chen Changsheng's face.

He stood around calmly for a while, then he began to walk towards the arched gate called Ethereal Opening.

Several hundred cultivators followed him into the Garden of

Zhou.

The spring rain fell on the outside of the forest as well.

The threadlike rain fell with a steady pitter patter.

Coming from Hanqiu City, several girls dressed in white walked through the drizzle,

In front of the forest, the priests of the Orthodoxy confirmed their identities as members of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green.

There had been a plague in the south. On the orders of the Pope, they had accompanied the medical officials of the court in treating the disease, so they had come somewhat late.

As Zhu Luo watched the group of girls walk into the forest, a look of understanding appeared on his face...

Amongst the group was a girl dressed in the ceremonial white garb of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green. Her appearance could be considered to be delicate and pretty, and her temperament seemed ordinary.

Sensing Zhu Luo's gaze, the girl calmly bowed in respect, then she continued to walk forward.

Zhu Luo smiled, but said nothing.

Chapter 247 - The Arrival Of Rain Warrants An Umbrella

The rainbow that opened the Garden of Zhou arose from the distant Mount Li.

The Longevity Sect consisted of more than a dozen mountain sects. Amongst these, the Mount Li Sword Sect was the strongest and most resolute, specializing in the killing arts. It was not in the midst of the mountains, but instead, it was the northernmost peak. It was like the tip of the sword, ready to pierce the north.

At dawn, the principal peak of Mount Li was shrouded in mist. From the halfway point of the mountain, one could only see a flat plain of clouds, like a solitary island suspended in the sea of clouds.

The rainbow shot out of a dwelling perched on the very highest point of Mount Li's principal peak.

Several hundred ancient pines stood sentinel on both sides of the stone steps. Xiao Songgong himself sat cross-legged at the very top of the steps. He was accompanied by three elders of the Discipline Hall, swords at ready as they stood guard outside the immortal cave.

Seeing the power of this formation, the Mount Li disciples under the stone path could not help but discuss about it.

"Is that brilliant light the key to the Garden of Zhou?"

"Just what is the key? It could actually bring forth a rainbow and leap great distances to open the Garden of Zhou? Eldest Brother will be okay, right?"

"What could go wrong? You think that the demons will come to my Mount Li to seize the key?"

"Right, the Sect Master is personally protecting eldest brother inside the cave. Four elders are set up in a sword formation outside. Taken together with Mount Li's Myriad Sword Array, even if the Demon Lord himself showed up, what could he do?"

"Now that you mention it, I'm really curious to see what really is in the Garden of Zhou. If I could just go in and see, that would be great."

"Then you have to hurry up and cultivate, or else you'll be stuck at the middle level of the Meditation realm forever. You won't be able to enter the Garden of Zhou in your lifetime, much less think about catching up to our seniors."

"Even Seventh Brother is an incomparably dazzling genius, how could we ever catch up?"

"Now that I think about it, could that youth called Chen Changsheng really have reached the upper level of Ethereal Opening?"

"Who knows? Northerners have always had a tendency for the preposterous, and their words are even more exaggerated. Even if the Orthodox Academy has already fallen into ruin, to let a child become its principal is absolute madness."

"Watch your tongue junior, it was the Pope himself that arranged it."

"I can't say it even if it's so beyond belief? Don't the elders usually speak this way when discussing this topic?"

"For that youth called Chen Changsheng to reach his level of cultivation in the short span of a year, there must be some exceptional qualities about him. Or else Second Brother would not hold him in such high regard."

"So what? Does that mean he's worthy of being discussed in the same breath as eldest brother? If eldest brother had not broken into Star Condensation and was able to enter the Garden of Zhou, I don't think that Chen Changsheng would be able grab anything. I also don't know what Senior Sister Xu is thinking. When a true dragon is right before her eyes, can she not tell who's the better and stronger one?"

In the past few months, as soon as the external disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect got to talking about their seniors that had gone to study abroad in the capital or about their Eldest Brother's extremely famous love troubles, Chen Changsheng's name would naturally come up. Afterwards, the boring cycle of scorn, caution and scorn began again.

However in the next moment, all discussion had suddenly ceased as a distinct trembling was transmitted throughout the principal peak of Mount Li. Although it was not that big, the sea of clouds remaining as peaceful as ever, the faces of the people on the mountain were suddenly panic stricken, because something like this had never happened before.

On the perimeter of the sea of clouds, bright lights began to suddenly appear. Countless sword images wielding awesome power began to move amongst the sea of clouds. On the occasion, they would leap up like the rising sun, and at times, they would disappear into the clouds like a waterfall. The dense and innumerable sword images danced in the air with a mournful whistle. It was like seeing a vast school of swordfish searching for food in the ocean.

This was famous Myriad Sword Array of Mount Li from the legends.

After a while, the Myriad Sword Array could sense no sign of enemies. Following the rules of the array, the innumerable swords hid themselves away in the numerous sword cavities that dotted the peak.

The Mount Li disciples turned in panic towards the summit. They saw that the rainbow still remained, yet, there seemed to be something inside it now. Perhaps it was more accurate to say that the multi-colored ray of light had been thrown into disorder.

Seated at the top of the steps, the cross-legged elder Xiao Songgong suddenly opened his eyes. He stared at the rainbow that stretched off into the distance and harshly asked, "What's going on?"

The three elders of the Discipline Hall had even graver expressions. They turned towards the immortal cave from which the rainbow had arisen.

An extremely prolonged whistle resounded from the cave.

Along with this whistle, the disorderly rainbow very quickly restabilized.

However, Xiao Songgong and the other three Mount Li elders did not relax.

For the venerable Sect Master to have to use the long whistle of his true sword, just what could have happened?

In the next moment, the Mount Li Sect Master's calm and dignified voice rang out.

"Send a message to the Li Palace. There has been a change in Hanqiu City. It may be that the demons have moved."

Many tens of thousands of li from Hanqiu city was a snowy plain. There was snow as far as the eye could see. Although it was spring, the snow here still piled up high, like the plumage of the peacock.

If the snow stopped for just a few moments, one would probably be able to make out the only city which could stand side to side with the Great Zhou capital, the imposing demon city.

A demon man cloaked in a black robe walked through the snowstorm, his back facing the increasingly distant Xuelao City. Only when the snowstorm had completely concealed the silhouette of the city did the man stop. He turned in the direction of the remote south, and an enchanting smile appeared on his lips.

From his walking speed and slightly crooked posture, this demon male was most likely very old.. It must be known that Demons had always been known for their incredibly strong bodies and almost perfect movements. When he had looked towards the south, his black robe had lifted. His deathly pale face could be seen. His skin seemed to be suffused with the sickly green color of death that all people loathed and feared, and yet, the smile on his lips was as enchanting as ever. This was because his charm had already surpassed any words, and could even rise victorious over the god of death.

He sat down in the snow and took out a black-colored square plate.

This black square plate was constructed of some sort of unknown material. It seemed to generate heat, for whenever snow would fall on it, it would instantly melt and turn into steam.

The steam became fog.

The black square plate was obscured by the fog. The demon male's face was also covered by fog, his face became indistinct. Only his two shining eyes were impossible to conceal.

On the fog-obscured black plate appeared all sorts of scenery. Compared to the real scenery, this scenery on the plate was of course much smaller. In the plate, one could see several mountains and river, a plain, as well as several gardens. Those gardens were constructed in a completely different style to the ornate style of Xuelao City. It seemed more similar to humanity's gardens in the south.

The demon male closed his eyes in thought for a while, then he lifted his head and once again looked south.

In the midst of this snowstorm, he logically should not have been able to see anything.

Yet he saw a rainbow.

His mood seemed to change as he sorrowfully said, "For decades I have not seen you, and still nothing has changed."

After saying these words, the demon male calmed down. With an indifferent expression, he stretched out his hand like he was going to seize the air.

The demons had a proverb about fetching the moon out of the water.

His current actions were very similar to the proverb, somewhat preposterous.

However, when he withdrew his hand, there was a sliver of rainbow in his fingers.

He had managed to tear away a piece of the rainbow that was heading towards the Garden of Zhou.

Next, he carefully placed that piece of rainbow on the northeast position of the black square plate.

When the fog surrounding the plate touched the rainbow, it disappeared, leaving a path.

Many thousands of li from Hanqiu City was a tea hill. There was tea wherever the eye could see. Since it was spring, the tea trees naturally flourished, like the plumage of the peacock. If the wind blew or that the sun shone for too long, waves of the fragrance of tea would assault the nose.

In the early morning, the depths of the tea hill was surrounded by fog. Within the fog, one could faintly make out a path that headed off into the verdant mountains and fields. An old man carrying a zither and a small girl of about ten years of age walked along in this path towards the center of the fog. The girl's face seemed very childish, and her appearance was picturesque, yet for some reason, she gave off an atmosphere that would make people tremble in fear.

The zither-carrying old man and the small girl disappeared into the fog. Ahead of them, the figures of several people could be made out. After a short while, a man and woman also walked into tea hill. By their appearance, they seemed like husband and wife, honest and straightforward. The husband carried a carrying pole while the wife brought along an iron pot. However, even if they planned to sit on the side of the path and sell food to the passersby, the pot was still somewhat too large.

No one knew what sort of truths were concealed by this fog that blanketed the tea hill. No one knew that this path that thrust into the fog had its final destination at a place called the Garden of Zhou.

Because regardless of who it was, nobody knew that a second door to the Garden of Zhou could be opened.

The snowstorm raged.

For that demon male to forcefully open the Garden of Zhou, he had clearly consumed much of his strength, both physically and mentally. His face was extremely pale, and the sickly green aura of death about him had grown thicker.

He silently prayed at the black square plate, and the scenery in the plate gradually grew more distinct. One could even see the several hundred human cultivators that had just entered the Garden of Zhou.

Amongst these several hundred human cultivators, he very easily found his objective. Extending his hand, he snapped his fingers over the heads of Qi Jian and Zhexiu, igniting two life flames. He then directed the life flames into two bronze flasks. The bronze flasks floated in the air, the ferocity of the snowstorm incapable of snuffing out the life flames.

The demon male calmly looked at the black square plate, searching for his next target. After a while, his gaze rested upon those maidens from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, accoutered in their ceremonial white robes.

A third bronze flask floated in the snowstorm.

Lastly, he looked at Chen Changsheng.

He looked at Chen Changsheng's figure for a very long time, then he chuckled.

He had handed Qi Jian, Zhexiu, and that maiden from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green over to his subordinates, the people that had just entered the Garden of Zhou via the tea hill.

"I think that you need to continue to live, at the very least until you're twenty. I can't let you die so easily, so I'll keep my eyes on you."

His black robed figure was quite striking against the snowstorm as he said this to Chen Changsheng.

On the arched gate to the Garden of Zhou were written the two words "Ethereal Opening". This also represented the rule governing who could enter. Only Ethereal Opening cultivators were permitted, only they would not be destroyed by the rules governing this miniature world.

Several hundred cultivators filtered through the arched gate into the quiet garden, then they each began to go off on their own. The vast majority of the cultivators from the Orthodoxy's faction would bid farewell to Chen Changsheng before taking their leave, while the cultivators from the southern sects would notify Liang Xiaoxiao.

In a short time, the garden returned to its former tranquility.

Chen Changsheng stood on that small bridge, watching the water flow by. Suddenly, he felt somewhat uncomfortable.

Zhexiu stood behind him. He said, "It's not yet time to be grieving over the passing of the spring or advent of the autumn, yet, you seem to be doing it ahead of time."

Chen Changsheng chuckled, then he prepared to leave. Suddenly, he felt a strange sensation, like someone was watching him.

He looked around the garden but he did not see anyone. However, he continued to sense that something was out there.

He cultivated the Dao of following his heart, so he was in no rush to leave. Instead, he stood on the bridge for a very long time.

Suddenly, it began to drizzle. Dots of water began to appear on the bridge, while the water underneath began to be covered with tiny ripples.

He looked up at the sky in silence, then he took out the umbrella from his bosom.

The umbrella seemed very shabby, yet also very heavy.

It was the Yellow Paper Umbrella.

When he opened up the umbrella, the feeling of being watched suddenly disappeared.

He turned to Zhexiu and said, "Let's go."

Chapter 248 - Small, Small Su

Zhexiu walked up, and he looked at the Yellow Paper Umbrella in Chen Changsheng's hand. He asked, "What's wrong?"

Chen Changsheng did not know how to explain it, and said after thinking a little, "[A sudden impulse](#)?"

Zhexiu stayed silent for a while, before saying, "That's an illness."

(TN: Tide Rush of Blood, Zhexiu's illness, can also mean 'a sudden impulse' or 'to be carried away by a whim'.)

Chen Changsheng began to laugh, "I should be able to treat that illness."

The two people walked over the stone bridge. Carrying the umbrella, they disappeared into the misty rain.

A while later, several girls of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, who had entered the Garden of Zhou later than them, had also arrived at the stone bridge.

One of the teenage girls had a pretty and delicate face. She seemed to be very ordinary, just like the average, commonly seen disciple in sects for cultivation.

That young girl stopped at the end of the bridge. She raised her head to look at the drizzle in the sky, and felt that there was

something abnormal.

A girl, who was slightly older looked, looked at the other girl's tilted head. An expression of reverence could be seen through her eyes.

Another girl looked at the girl on the end of the bridge. She gathered up courage and asked, "Senior, do you not want to see him?"

That girl said calmly, "There is no difference between seeing or not. Since there are no differences in seeing him or not, I hate trouble."

Tens of thousands of kilometres away from Hanqiu City, in the wind and snow, a male of the demon race shrouded in black robes looked at the black square disc. His brows were slightly furrowed.

In that moment before, Chen Changsheng had disappeared, and closely following, Zhexiu also disappeared.

He did not know that Chen Changsheng had opened up the umbrella that was gifted to him by the Old Master of the Wenshui Tang clan. Pondering this silently, just exactly what had happened?

Currently, nobody understood the Garden of Zhou better than him, and nobody could scheme as deeply as him. He believed that he could control the situation perfectly, with the black square plate

as his chessboard and those people in the Garden of Zhou as his chess pieces. However, at this moment, he had suddenly discovered that there were chess pieces that had disappeared from his chessboard. This surprised him very much.

Floating in the snowstorm, there were three bronze flasks. Within them burned the life flames of Zhexiu and the other two. These flasks were already linked with his subordinates that had sneaked into the Garden of Zhou. However, he was not able to deal with Chen Changsheng in time, so he could only wait for his trace to appear again. He did not know when that drizzle in the Garden of Zhou would stop.

The snowstorm suddenly stopped.

It was not the normal stop, and it had actually, truly stopped.

The sound of the wind became silent. The snowflakes that were like peacock feathers froze mid air, and they were scattered in the air and ground around the demon race male.

He raised his head, and looked at a certain region deep in the snow. His expression remained apathetic, and he squinted his eyes. They seemed to be thin and long, and elegant, however, they carried a heavy, deathly aura.

A distinct sword slash slowly appeared from that area, like it had cut open the snowy air.

Where did this slash come from, for it to be able to stop the snow and wind in the land of demons?

“To plot a murder for a few members of the younger generation, you revealed your special techniques. Don’t you feel that the price that you have paid is just a little too great?”

A voice resounded in the snowy sky. This voice was very cool, but it also carried an undisciplined feeling.

“Actually, we have already searched for hundreds of years. Only until now did we learn that the advisor of the demon race was actually a Candle Shadow Shaman.”

The demon race male smiled a little, but he did not say anything.

As it turns out, he was the most mysterious and the scariest, the legendary military advisor of the Demon Race, Black Robe.

No wonder he wore black robes. It was extremely obvious amidst the wind and snow.

Then who was the owner of the cool voice?

Facing the unfathomable advisor of the Demon Race, Black Robe, this person was not scared at all, and they even seemed to be slightly rough and uncaring.

With the terrifying sound of space ripping open, the sword slash in the snowy sky began to slowly grow larger. From within, a person walked out.

Walking out of the sword slash, this person seemed to be enveloped with a layer of sharpness. His clothes and appearance were completely coated in bright light.

Only until that person had taken several steps on the snowy ground did the sharp light slowly disappear.

He was a human male. No one knew how old he was. If it was just looking at the undisciplined look in his eyes, he seemed to still be a youngster. However, seeing the peace and profoundness within his pupils, it was like he had already cultivated for thousands of years.

The man walked on the snowy ground with his hand clasped. He carried a sword on his waist, which swayed gently. He seemed to be very casual, so he also seemed very natural and unrestrained.

“In order to do something, you must always pay a certain price.”

Black Robe looked at that man and said calmly, “Su Li, you have already roamed the world for several hundreds of years. Perhaps you still do not understand this idea?”

There was only one person in the world who was surnamed Su and could cause the advisor of the demon race army to be interested and converse with.

The junior uncle of Mount Li, Su Li.

To the human world, the demon army advisor Black Robe was the greatest nightmare. On a certain level, he was even scarier than the Demon Lord.

Then the junior uncle of Mount Li, Su Li, was the oddest legend, the most reckless ocean.

Because of the Garden of Zhou, they had met. Who was able to leave later?

Su Li was not interested in what Black Robe had said.

From hundreds of years ago, he had already been extremely disinterested in the extremely profound conversation of his senior, the Sect Leader, the Holy Maiden, the Pope, His Majesty Taizong and other important figures.

He was only interested in the sword, in travelling, in the floating clouds and the starry sky.

He asked directly, “How many people have you sent to sneak into the Garden of Zhou? Are there still tribe members of the Candle Shadow Shamans that are still being used by you?”

Black Robe waved his hand., and the mist above the black, square

plate began to move. The surroundings and people in the Garden of Zhou disappeared.

He looked at Su Li and his eyes squinted. He smiled slightly, “What? Worrying about your daughter?”

Hearing this, Su Li also began smiling with his eyes squinted.

When Black Robe’s eyes squinted, his eyes became long and thin, and very elegant. However, they were filled with a frightening killing intent.

When Su Li squinted his eyes, his smile seemed to reveal the happiness within him. However, it currently carried the sharp intent of a sword.

He said with regret, “No wonder you are the legendary Black Robe. You are indeed scary. You actually even know about this.”

Black Robe said calmly, “There are very few things that I do not know in the world.”

Su Li’s smile gradually disappeared, and his expression became serious. He asked, “Then, do you know how terrifying I am when I go mad?”

Black Robe’s smile became even more genuine. He said, “Back then when you went mad for the first time, the Myriad Sword Array of Mount Li was destroyed by you. The second time you

went mad, seventeen elders of the Longevity Sect died in one night. As a result, even now, they are unable to choose a sect leader, causing the Six Saints to decrease by one. You humans say that Painted Armor Xiao Zhang is a madman, but how could they know that he cannot even be compared to a toe of yours. It is just that the things that you do when you go mad are so crazy that no one is daring enough to mention it.

Su Li explained seriously, “The second time has nothing to do with me, at least I won’t admit it.”

Black Robe only smiled a little, and he did not say anything.

Su Li said, “Since you know how terrifying I am when I go mad, why are you still doing this?”

Black Robe stopped smiling, and said extremely seriously while looking at him, “It means that I have confidence in controlling everything.”

Su Lu raised a brow, and said, “What I don’t understand the most is that just how are you able to control the Garden of Zhou? At that time, I had even doubted whether you were His Excellency Wang Zhice or not.

Black Robe said calmly, “In the past hundreds of years, you were always travelling around in the world. I believe that you were always looking for me. May I ask why?”

Su Li looked at him quietly. His right hand landed on the sword hilt, and he said, “Up until now, I still don’t know who you are. But since I found you after great difficulty, I don’t want to let you escape.”

Without a question, the military advisor of the Demon Race, Black Robe, was the most mysterious and terrifying enemy of the human world.

Back then, if it were not for him, under the leadership of Taizong, perhaps Xuelao City would have been already taken by the allied army, with the demon race becoming just a noun in history.

In the past hundreds of years, the thing that the experts of the human world wanted to do the most was to find Black Robe, and then kill him.

The problem was that right up to this moment, nobody even knew the true appearance of Black Robe, much less found any trace of him.

Until now, when Black Robe had plucked a sliver of the rainbow from the sky, opening a door to the Garden of Zhou. It alarmed Mount Li, allowing Su Li, who was currently travelling in the north, to find him.

“Finding me is not important, what is important is killing me. The problem is that can you kill me?”

Black Robe looked at Su Li calmly. He said, “I touched the Garden of Zhou, revealing a small trail, which you took advantage of. However, have you ever thought that this may have been an ambush against you? Just like what was said before, you looked for me for hundreds of years, and still failed to find me. Then, if it was not that I wanted you to find me, how would you still be able to find me?”

Su Li’s squint became even more intense. It was filled with smiles, and the sharp intent slowly dispersed.

Black Robe seemed to not realise at all, and said plainly, “At the start, when I let that person of the Yeshe tribe to go and assassinate that little princess of the demi-human race, it was for you humans to discover the Garden of Zhou first. In order to make you trust it, I had even borrowed the His Majesty’s Heavenly Fog Net. Of course, that young fellow Qiushan Jun’s behaviour in the outer garden had somewhat exceeded my expectations. My strategies that were originally planned were unable to be used, so I could only use my backup plan.”

Su Li said, “You want to kill people in the garden?”

Black Robe said, “Correct.”

Su Li said, “If you really use such a method, why haven’t you done it in the past hundreds of years?”

Black Robe looked at him, and said with a smile, “Because only around a dozen years ago did you have a treasured daughter.

Because your daughter can only enter this year, I just wanted you to know that I have the power to hurt your daughter, so you would definitely come and find me. Only like that can I kill you.”

Su Li seemed to understand something immediately. He said, “So in the end, it is still for me to die?”

Black Robe said, “After spending so much effort into arranging such a situation, it definitely should be used to gain a reasonable amount of benefits.”

Su Li was slightly awkward, and said, “I am not a Saint, nor do I hold the position as one of the Storms of the Cardinal Directions. To the world of humans, I am not important.”

“You are not being modest, but instead laughing at my insight.”

Black Robe shook his head, and said sternly, “In my eyes, the so-called Five Saints and Eight Storms of the Cardinal Directions are not enough to be feared, because they have already grown old and they do not require thought to be dealt with. However, you are different. You are not held down by matters of the world. You are just one lonely person, so you are daring to kill, you are able to kill, you can like to kill, you can kill for the greater good, or even just massacre indiscriminately. If my race wants to be victorious over the human race, someone like you must die.”

Su Li stayed silent for a very long time. He was suddenly somewhat distressed, and said, “Why do I feel very happy listening to these words?”

Black Robe smiled, and he did not say anything. Holding the black, square plate, he shook it gently. The mist disappeared, and everything returned to how it was before.

Su Li's expression instead became a little cold, and said, "You closed the Garden of Zhou."

Black Robe said, "This is Mister Zhou's world. Although I have some understanding, but I am unable to completely close it. However, closing it for a few days is still achievable.

Su Li raised his brows slightly and said, "What exactly do you want to do?"

Black Robe said, "As I said, I put so much effort into creating this situation, there must be enough benefits. Other than you, I still want to kill many people."

Su Li said coldly, "Only cultivators at Ethereal Opening can enter the Garden of Zhou. Even if you have planned beforehand, there is still a limit to how strong the subordinates you sent. How can a few demon bastards win against several hundred people?

"Then have you never thought why you humans were never able to defeat us? Because the more of you humans there are, the easier it is for internal conflicts to occur. Other than jackals, I really have not seen other species that like killing each other as much as you humans. Of course, I have also never thought that a side door opened to the Garden of Zhou can bury several hundred human

cultivators at the Ethereal Opening realm. I just want to kill a few people. That's all, it's not that difficult."

Su Li asked, "Who do you want to kill?"

Black Robe smiled, "Zhexiu is too similar to you in the past, so he must be killed. The two girls, your daughter included, also must die. And that teenage principal of the Orthodox Academy called Chen Changsheng? It should be just those four. It is very regretful that Gou Hanshi did not enter the Garden of Zhou, otherwise it would be about all of them. Why kill these four people? Because they are the future of the human race, and as for you, you are the present of the human race. With the Garden of Zhou appearing again, it will help me destroy the present and future of the human race. If the owner of the garden were to find out about this matter, he should feel very relieved."

Su Li stayed silent for a while before questioning, "What about Qiushan Jun?"

"To have a True Dragon Bloodline and reach Star Condensation before twenty... he indeed is a true genius."

Black Robe looked at him with a smile and said, "Sadly, that member of the younger generation is a lovesick person. When he knows opening the Garden of Zhou is opening the gate of the abyss for those four people, when he knows that Xu Yourong died because of him, he will definitely regret it for his whole life. To handle such a lovesick person, leaving him alive is even more ruthless than killing him."

Su Li said, “Wang Po, Xiao Zhang, Liang Wangsun.”

These three names were all on the Proclamation of Liberation.

When he said these names, he was questioning and also challenging.

Black Robe thought about it and said, “Just like what you said, the human race is so adaptable, so I definitely have to have some patience, and go slowly. I can kill slowly. I believe that there will always be a day where I can kill them all.”

Saying this, he began to cough. His handsome face began to pale, and the greenness under his skin began to grow darker. It seemed especially weird, and a line of blood had even begun flowing from the corner of his lips.

Su Li’s body also began swaying slightly. His gaze seemed to dull slightly.

Only up until now did several intersecting sword slashes appear in the motionless snowy sky.

Some of those sword slashes flew several li into the snow, and they had even seemed to cut the sky open.

However, it did not break in the end, because outside the snowy

sky, there was still a dancing snowstorm.

As it turned out, as they were conversing, the two greatest experts in the world were always fighting.

Following the coughs of Black Robe, the motionless snowy sky also began to move slightly, and the snowflakes began to fall again.

Several mountainous silhouettes slowly appeared in the area surrounding the snowy plain. Their overbearing pressure was extremely terrifying.

Several great demon generals had appeared.

A shadow bursted out of the faraway Xuelao City. It covered up half of the sky, and landed on the snowy plain.

Su Li stared blankly, and he turned around to face the south. Squinting both his eyes, his expression became slightly sad, like he was sighing with emotion.

Afterwards, he yelled out, "Somebody come quickly!"

Chapter 249 - Going Upstream... (Part One)

The Mount Li's Myriad Sword Array once again moved into action. In the light of sun, the innumerable sword glows gleamed like liquid gold.

With a bright cry, the white crane departed from Holy Maiden Peak.

In the Imperial Palace, on the Dew Platform, the Divine Empress's figure was nowhere to be seen.

In the Li Palace, a bell suddenly rang out without any warning. Although it did not seem urgent, it nevertheless rang out without end, like it would never come to a stop.

In that grass hut outside Hanqiu City, Zhu Luo suddenly opened his eyes. His eyes only contained vigilance and surprise, without a trace of intoxication.

In the carriage, Mei Lisha also opened his eyes. Within his turbid eyes, an indescribable expression flashed.

Neither of them knew what was happening in the distant north outside of Xuelao City, nor did they know about the shaking of Mount Li or the ringing of the Li Palace's bell at that moment. However, in that previous moment, they had sensed an extremely shocking matter... the Garden of Zhou had just closed.

The forest was thrown into chaos. The elder of the Longevity Sect, the priests of the Orthodoxy, and all the teachers from the various sects and academies hurried towards the impenetrable fog.

The lightning still flashed through the fog like snakes, but the rainbow that had opened a path through the fog this morning had at some point disappeared. The path was once more occupied by the fog.

The rainbow was still there, but its position was constantly changed, so it was impossible for it properly open the path. All it could do was cause the fog to roll about.

Zhu Luo and Mei Lisha stood in front, their expressions solemn as they viewed the scene before them. With the strength of their eyes, they could faintly see that winding path. They confirmed that the path had not completely disappeared, but it had been disturbed by some force so that it was temporarily impossible to use.

"The miniature world naturally possesses its own rules for moving within it. Unless one possesses them, it is impossible to change them."

Mei Lisha slowly continued, "Unless Zhou Dufu himself came back to life, no one can cause the Garden of Zhou to close prematurely. Presumably after a few days, the door to the garden will open once again."

Despite these words, the atmosphere in the forest did not grow

any more relaxed.

Just who could affect the opening of the Garden of Zhou? What did that person plan to do?

Zhu Luo and Mei Lisha did not need to think. They knew that it was definitely the work of the Demons.

They could even directly think of the name of the perpetrator... Black Robe.

The more Mei Lisha thought about it, the more concerned he became.

When would the door to the Garden of Zhou open once more?

Within those days, what sort of things will be happening in the Garden?

What would those people find?

What would happen between them?

Was there anyone that could control the situation?

Zhu Luo suddenly spoke. "She went in."

After a moment of silence, Mei Lisha responded, "We'll have to see what he does."

The people inside the Garden of Zhou had not realized what was happening outside.

With Zhexiu holding the umbrella, Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu walked through the light rain.

Taking leave of the quiet garden with the small bridge, they had arrived near a lush and verdant mountain.

Standing on a cliff and gazing at the forest below him that was wet with rain, then looking off towards that distant plain bathed in the sunlight, Chen Changsheng's mind felt free.

The Garden of Zhou was not a garden. It was a true miniature world.

Zhou Dufu was truly worthy of his reputation as the strongest cultivator of the continent in the past one thousand years. This miniature world that he had left behind was many times larger than the Pope's Green Leaf world.

Following the mountain path, they entered the forest. Exiting the forest, the pair arrived near a river. Off in the distance, they could see that the plain was still shimmering in the sunlight, yet they had drawn no closer to it.

Chen Changsheng examined the flowing water bottle and he realized it had taken an hour for them to walk there. Comparing that to the time he kept in his head, he confirmed that time had not flown any faster or slower.

"I heard that on those plains, one month inside is equivalent to one day outside the garden." Zhexiu continued, "Only it's been more than a hundred years, yet no one that has ever entered the Garden of Zhou has been able to penetrate the depths of those plains. Nobody knows if Zhou Dufu's legacy lies within. The only thing that is known is that the plain conceals many dangers, as well as extraordinarily fierce monsters.

Chen Changsheng had studied the records related to this matter in the Daoist Canon, so when he heard the word 'monster', he subconsciously glanced at Zhexiu.

As a child, the wolf youth had grown up in the snowy plains. He should be an expert in hunting monsters.

The sort of monsters that can live and reproduce in that plain aren't something that an Ethereal Opening cultivator can oppose."

Zhexiu expressionlessly said, "So don't think about it too much."

Seeing that distant plain, there was no way that Chen Changsheng could not think about it. He subconsciously rubbed the hilt of his dagger.

Perhaps because the sound of the river was quite loud, or because it was only in his sea of consciousness, Zhexiu did not hear the two feeble squeaks that came from the dagger.

"Where are we going?"

The Garden of Zhou had five regions. It seemed to be calmness from a distance, but actually extremely treacherous plain. Other than the grassland, the other four regions had been, for the most, already completely explored by human cultivators and demons several hundred years ago. The remnants of many of the continent's heaven-shaking experts had been recovered and their legacies had been restored. Many magical artifacts also saw the light of day once again. After the passage of several hundred years, no one knew what was left in the Garden of Zhou, but all the schools and sects agreed, for the current generation to obtain any sort of legacy or magical artifact, they would have to work all the harder and risk all the more than the previous generations of cultivators.

Chen Changsheng thought it over and said, "Is there any place that you want to go and see?"

When he had been viewing monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books, he had already thought of what he wanted to see when he entered the Garden of Zhou.

He would see some sights, and search for some artifacts. After that night, he had amended his travel plans somewhat, but he had absolutely left that plain for last.

Zhexiu replied, "I want to go to the Sword Pool."

Then he added, "If the Sword Pool is real that is."

Chen Changsheng replied, "The Sword Pool is only something spoken of in tales, but no one has ever seen it... if over the past several hundred years, our seniors couldn't find it, I don't think that we'll be able to."

"There are no swords." Zhexiu's seriously said as he looked at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng pondered the matter for awhile. It was true that over all these centuries, the Garden of Zhou had opened so many times and so many cultivators had entered to explore and they found many magical artifacts, treasures and precious legacies, and yet no one had found any swords. Whether it was the mountain range where wind angrily howled through the pines or the lakeside where the bluish waves were like mirrors, not a single sword had been found.

Where did the sword of all those experts who had fallen at Zhou Dufu's hand go?

The tales of the Sword Pool had a very reasonable basis.

"Even if we're very lucky and do actually find the Sword Pool, all those swords are most definitely broken and devoid of spirit. It

would be better to go searching in those caves in the mountains. We might even find a convenient magical artifact."

"I don't have a sword."

Zhexiu seriously told him, "If it's possible, I want to find a sword that I can use. And anyway, I don't like magical artifacts."

Only then did Chen Changsheng realize that Zhexiu had only ever used his hands to fight. After thinking about it for a while, he said, "I remember reading in the notes of our predecessors that if you follow this river upstream, around a dozen li up on the right-hand side is a mountain stream. Someone had once found a scabbard at the bottom of this stream. If the Sword Pool truly exists in the Garden of Zhou, then it should be in that vicinity."

For some reason, the rain stopped.

Chen Changsheng put away the umbrella, then he and Zhexiu began to make their way upstream.

They did not walk far before they suddenly began to hear the clashing of swords up ahead.

As they rounded the beach, they saw a girl leaning against a tree, her left shoulder completely stained with blood. It was the senior from Holy Maiden Peak that had journeyed together with Chen Changsheng from the capital.

That girl called Ye Xiaolian stood guard by her side, her sword bared and her face filled with fury.

Chapter 250 - Going Upstream... (Part Two)

With a clank, the sword glow by the river suddenly disappeared, and a flying sword returned to its sheath.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu gazed across, and they saw that the one who attacked was a middle-aged cultivator. His eyes were clear and deep, and spirited. Beside him was a young daoist, who probably was his companion.

The hundreds of cultivators that had entered the Garden of Zhou were all in the Ethereal Opening realm. Most of them were the backbone force of various academies and sects, so there were not many people like him that could have their age determined with a glance. Chen Changsheng thought that if he was not a loose cultivator, then he would belong to a slightly small sect.

What he thought was correct. The middle-aged cultivator was called Fu Qiansong. He was a cultivator from a sect called the Clear Void Monastery in the south. He was even the monastery master for the Clear Void Monastery, but his cultivation was still at the middle level of Ethereal Opening. Placing him in groups like the Li Palace or the Longevity Sect, perhaps it was not very special. However, in a normal sect, he could be considered to be an impressive expert. As for the young person, it was his eldest disciple who had just undergone Ethereal Opening.

Seeing Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu suddenly appear, the young Daoist of the Clear Void Monastery immediately began to grow nervous. His right hand trembled slightly, like he was prepared to summon his flying sword at any time.

The middle-aged cultivator had recognised Chen Changsheng's identity at first glance, and he stuck out his hand to stop his disciple. Afterwards, he greeted Chen Changsheng by clasping his hands, and said, "I greet Principal Chen."

This unknown small sect, the Clear Void Monastery, belonged to the system of the Orthodoxy. According to the rules in the Garden of Zhou, when this middle-aged cultivator moved against the disciples of Holy Maiden Peak, he did not have any difficulties at heart at all, but when facing Chen Changsheng, he instead became respectful and cautious. This was because he still had a life outside of the Garden of Zhou after all, so how could he be daring enough to be disrespectful to Chen Changsheng?

Only after listening to the middle-aged cultivator's self introduction did Chen Changsheng understand what had happened. Looking at the fragmented magical artifact in his hand, Chen Changsheng thought of how it was said that most of the legacies and treasures in the Garden of Zhou were already discovered, so how could the two girls from the Holy Maiden Peak find it so easily?

"It was a magical artifact found by a predecessor of my Gentle Stream Monastery eighty years ago. However, it was just that she was in a hurry when she left and she could not take it with her, so she hid it under the tree next to the river."

Ye Xiaolian looked at that middle-aged cultivator and said angrily, "It was originally mine. You actually ambushed me and forcefully stole it. Isn't it embarrassing?"

The middle-aged cultivator's expression seemed slightly awkward. He was in his fifties this year, and he had already undergone Ethereal Opening several years ago. Facing these two girls that had only undergone Ethereal Opening not too long ago, he had even used a method of ambush. If this news was spread outside, it definitely would not be too nice.

As the Clear Void Monastery was one of branches of the Orthodoxy, he did not fear the retaliation after this matter had occurred. Even if it was the legendary Holy Maiden Peak, the rules of the Garden of Zhou were set by the Saints. Since he had already destroyed his dignity, he definitely had to make his opponents leave the Garden of Zhou as soon as possible. However, as Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had appeared, he could only put his sword away.

Eighty years ago, a preceding Daoist nun of the Gentle Stream Monastery had entered the Garden of Zhou to discover mysteries. She found a fragmented magical artifact, but for some certain reason, she did not take it with her, and she instead hid it under a tree. After leaving the garden, she told this secret to later disciples, and she made them retrieve it after entering the Garden of Zhou. It could be imagined that in order to retrieve it, this old story still hid many secrets, and it was even enough to let a few people sigh with emotion.

Chen Changsheng looked at the injured girl from the Holy Maiden Peak and asked, "Senior Tong, are you alright?"

Similar to the Longevity Sect, the Holy Maiden Peak also

governed over many other sects, such as the Gentle Stream Monastery that Ye Xiaolian came from. As the cultivation potential of the young girl was rather good, perhaps she would be able to enter the Southern Stream Temple next year. The Southern Stream Temple did not have the rumored inner sect and outer sect separation. It was only Xu Yourong, who was the chosen successor of the Holy Maiden, who had some special treatment. Otherwise, according to the order of entering the sect, Xu Yourong should have called this girl surnamed Tong 'Senior'. Chen Changsheng did not know why he called her 'Senior' so naturally but he had always called her that from the Mausoleum of Books till now.

That Senior Tong stood up with the support of Ye Xiaolian. Fresh blood flowed between the fingers of her hand which were pressed against her shoulder. Her face was somewhat pale, and said shaking her head, "There should be no problems."

As she could break through to Ethereal Opening from one month of comprehending monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books, it could be said that her cultivation talent was outstanding. Ye Xiaolian was actually also able to break through to Ethereal Opening. Her luck was good, however, the main reason was the starlight Chen Changsheng had drawn in that night.

All of the examinees of the Grand Examination this year understood this very clearly, so outside of envy, those disciples from the Star Seizer Academy, Li Palace Academy and the Temple Seminary all felt slightly but truly grateful to him. However, for the two female disciples of the Holy Maiden Peak and other disciples of the southern sects, what they felt towards Chen Changsheng instead was more complex.

No southerner liked Chen Changsheng, however, they had to accept what he had done. Ye Xiaolian was only a young girl, so when she thought about matters, she was much more immature and much more direct. In the beginning, she humiliated Chen Changsheng on the Divine Avenue, but afterwards, her attitude changed slowly. After that night in the mausoleum, the only feeling left were admiration and gratefulness. Looking at the back of Chen Changsheng, she felt that her heart had calmed down a lot, like she had found something to rely on.

She supported her senior and stood up behind Chen Changsheng. She stared at the master and disciple from the Clear Void Monastery.

The middle-aged cultivator naturally did not care about the anger in her eyes, and he only cared about Chen Changsheng's attitude on this matter. He believed that with his cultivation of middle level Ethereal Opening, no matter how great Chen Changsheng's potential was, or that the indifferent looking teenager beside him may have been the legendary wolf cub, Chen Changsheng could not beat him. However, as he was a member of a branch of the Orthodoxy, how could he not worry about Chen Changsheng's backing from the Li Palace?

Taking advantage of the fact that Chen Changsheng could not say anything in time, he made a prompt decision, "The Garden of Zhou is extremely large. The two of us still want to look around some more, so I shall be taking my leave, Principal Chen."

The Senior Tong looked at Chen Changsheng and said apologetically, "Finding treasure in the Garden of Zhou relies on

your own skills. Originally, I would not ask Senior Chen for help, but it is only that that magical artifact is a beloved item of a predecessor in the temple. Before entering here, I was specially asked to bring it back for her. So I plead... ”

She spoke up to there, and stopped, as she felt that this series of pleading was somewhat unjustified.

Chen Changsheng indeed did not know what to do. What the master and disciple of the Clear Void Monastery had done, which was ambushing and forcefully taking, naturally was disgraceful, but the Garden of Zhou's rules were like that. Also, the opposing was a part of the Orthodoxy and had not been disrespectful to him at all. Contrarily, although Xu Yourong and he had an engagement, he did not have any affiliations with the Holy Maiden Peak at all. The north and the south were already going in different directions. Did he have to move against a northerner for a southerner?

This was the first time he had met such a difficult choice.

He only felt that those Saints, who had set down the rules for the Garden of Zhou years ago, really did cause people to loathe them.

Just at this moment, an extremely sharp sword intent erupted from the forests far away.

The expression of the middle-aged cultivator changed slightly. He clasped his hands at Chen Changsheng with respect, and he was about to leave with his disciple.

Senior Tong gave out a soft sigh, and she did not say anything more. Ye Xiaolian instead stared at Chen Changsheng with her eyes wide, like she did not understand why he had let this person go. She thought, “Are you really the son-in-law of the Holy Maiden Peak?”, and then instead, she suddenly realised that if she thought like this, Chen Changsheng had really replaced the Qiushan Jun’s once seemingly irreplaceable place in her heart.

Chen Changsheng looked the master and disciple who had waded through the river to the other side, and he finally made a decision.

However, just at this moment, the tree leaves swayed slightly, and Zhuang Huanyu appeared on the riverbed.

He looked at Chen Changsheng with an indifferent expression. He did not say anything, but the meaning was very clear.

He looked at Chen Changsheng to see what he would actually do.

Chapter 251 - The Green Smoke Gives Warning

On the journey to the Garden of Zhou, Zhuang Huanyu had stayed in his carriage, seldom showing his face. Perhaps, he had been purposely avoiding Chen Changsheng. Chen Changsheng cared little for what Zhuang Huanyu did, to the extent that he did not even know that Zhuang Huanyu had left the Mausoleum of Books, came to Hanqiu City, and entered the Garden of Zhou. However, Chen Changsheng knew very well why Zhuang Huanyu had chosen to appear, and why he had come to him.

He was the Principal of the Orthodox Academy. Whether it was because of the position of the Li Palace or the words of the archbishop said before they entered the garden, all the cultivators of the northern sects looked to him for leadership. Of course, in handling matters, he had to be fair. The problem was, at this very moment, what would be considered fair?

He took a step forward, only to be blocked by Zhexiu.

A hint of scorn appeared in Zhuang Huanyu's eyes.

Zhexiu's face remained as impassive as ever. He slowly said, "You don't need to handle this sort of thing."

Zhexiu did not mean that Chen Changsheng could not handle the matter, but rather that there were people who could handle it for him.

The chilling sword intent that had come from the distant forest did not belong to Zhuang Huanyu, but another person.

The master and disciple from the Clear Void Monastery were very clear on this point, which is why they had so urgently taken their leave.

Just at this moment, the chilling sword intent arrived at the riverbank. It tore through the trees on the shore and tyrannically slashed at the body of that master from the Clear Void Monastery.

The master's expression abruptly changed. With a shout, he wielded his sword with both hands to block the intent.

There was a sharp sound of clashing.

Waves broke out on the riverbank as the water was thrown into chaos, even revealing the pebbles on the riverbed.

Only then was everyone able to clearly make out the sword that had flown out of the woods.

The progress of that sword had seemingly been halted by the sword of the master from Clear Void Monastery, but it suddenly began to exude a great brilliance, like it was about to grow even mightier and sunder the entire riverbank.

With a massive explosion, the water flowing in the river was all sent flying about. Countless pebbles rolled about in chaos, and the riverbank was even more inundated in dust and smoke.

With a groan, the Clear Void Monastery master's stomach was pushed down like it had been struck. His knees bent and then like a broken kite, he began flying towards the river, his two feet leaving a clear trail in the riverbank.

After being pushed more than a dozen yards, his progress finally came to a halt. His face was extremely pale and his stomach now bore the extremely clear mark of a sword slash, one corner of it bleeding blood.

The river water that had been shocked into the air fell down at this moment, drenching the master from the Clear Void Monastery, making him cut a rather sorry figure.

The young daoist hurriedly ran over to the other side of the river.

“A truly tyrannical 'Mountain Spirit Splits the Cliff'.”

As he viewed this scene, Chen Changsheng silently thought to himself, back at the Ivy Festival, Qi Jian had used this Mount Li sword technique against Tang Thirty-Six. However, back then Qi Jian was not yet at Ethereal Opening. The 'Mountain Spirit Splits the Cliff' then and the one now were two completely different things.

He and Zhexiu both turned to the forest and they saw Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian emerge.

“Where do you think you're going?”

Although the river had begun to flow again, its sound was unable to mask Liang Xiaoxiao's frigid voice.

On the opposite bank, the master and disciple were supporting each other and they were preparing to leave. When both were at the middle level of Ethereal Opening, the sword arts of Mount Li would be much stronger than that of the Clear Void Monastery. How could some little-known master from the Clear Void Monastery be on par with the Divine State's Seven Laws? He had no other choice but to admit defeat.

Hearing these words, the Clear Void Monastery master turned around, a trace of anger visible in his pale face. "What do you want?"

Liang Xiaoxiao expressionlessly said, "Leave your things behind."

His teeth clenched, the master from the Clear Void Monastery threw over the damaged magical artifact in his hands.

Liang Xiaoxiao, not willing to let them leave yet, continued, "Then come over here and apologize."

The master from Clear Void Monastery shouted, "Don't try and

take advantage of me! Don't try and wield the power of Mount Li against me, that's too much."

He looked at Chen Changsheng as he said these words. The rules of the Garden of Zhou were like so: that senior and junior from the Holy Maiden Peak could not defeat him, so the magical artifact naturally became his. He could not beat Liang Xiaoxiao, so he naturally had to leave the magical artifact behind. However, the master looked in askance towards Chen Changsheng because there was no requirement that he needed to apologize to the southerners.

As if not hearing that, Liang Xiaoxiao took the magical artifact and returned it to the Holy Maiden Peak's Senior Tong.

For the southern continent to remain independent of the Zhou Dynasty and the Orthodoxy for so long was only because of the alliance between the Longevity Sect and Holy Maiden Peak. The disciples of these two great sects would commonly consider themselves as fellow martial brothers and sisters. It would not even be too excessive to call them disciples in the same sect.

Liang Xiaoxiao grasped his sword and began to head off to the opposite bank.

Chen Changsheng stated, "He is severely injured and he can no longer do battle."

This sentence did not include the words 'enough', but they contained the meaning.

Liang Xiaoxiao stopped and turned to Chen Changsheng, his eyes cold. The Mount Li Sword Sect and the Orthodox Academy had many hard to resolve disputes. Unlike Gou Hanshi and the others, Liang Xiaoxiao had not spent time under the same roof with Chen Changsheng. In his eyes, Chen Changsheng had always been a most troublesome existence.

Zhexiu still stood in front of Chen Changsheng, his face impassive.

Although he was only at the initial stage of Ethereal Opening, one full level below Liang Xiaoxiao, there was no fear in his face, not even anxiety.

Just like he had told Chen Changsheng in the woods outside the Mausoleum of Books, if the battles in the Grand Examination had been ones of life and death, he would not even fear Gou Hanshi, so he had no reason to fear Liang Xiaoxiao, who was only ranked third in the Seven Laws.

This was the confidence born from being accustomed to life and death, from slaying countless demons.

Qi Jian knitted his brow as he looked at Zhexiu, then went to go stand by Liang Xiaoxiao.

Liang Xiaoxiao said somewhat mockingly, "You didn't say anything before, but now you're trying to be fair?"

Chen Changsheng thought about it, then he decided not to explain what he had been preparing to do.

Senior Tong from Holy Maiden Peak, who was the subject of this conflict, unexpectedly did not take part, and she attempted to say a few mediatory words instead.

Liang Xiaoxiao said nothing, but the look of derision on his face only got worse.

"From the time I entered the Mausoleum of Books, you've always seemed to be hostile towards me."

Chen Changsheng earnestly asked him, "I don't understand why this is the case."

Liang Xiaoxiao looked like he had been asked an extremely stupid question. "I'm a disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect. For me to have hostility towards you, isn't that only right?"

Chen Changsheng pondered the matter, then pointed to Zhuang Huanyu. "He's a student of the Heavenly Dao Academy, so why is it that he's always been so hostile to me as well?"

Liang Xiaoxiao replied, "Perhaps the question that you should be pondering is that if the entire world hold enmity towards you, then isn't it you that's in the wrong?"

Chen Changsheng thought about this question in silence, then replied, "I've seriously considered this question, and I realized that it could also be the entire world that is wrong."

Qi Jian lightly pulled on Liang Xiaoxiao's sleeve.

Liang Xiaoxiao's expression was indifferent, and he said no more.

Chen Changsheng shook his head, then he waded across the river to the master and disciple from the Clear Void Monastery.

Examining that terrifying sword wound on that master's stomach, he said, "Your injury is too heavy. You two need to leave."

The young daoist thought to himself that they had only been in the Garden of Zhou for half a day, not having gained anything, and now they already had to leave! An expression of unwillingness suddenly appeared on his face.

Chen Changsheng stated, "Just as your master said before, these are the rules of the Garden of Zhou."

The young daoist looked at him and indignantly said, "You're one of the great powers of the Orthodoxy, why didn't you come and help us?"

Chen Changsheng did not respond, but he continued to measure the pulse of the Clear Void Monastery master. Lowering his head,

he said, "You must leave quickly."

The Clear Void Monastery master weakly nodded his head. Unlike his disciple, he was much more experienced in the ways of the world. He knew that although Chen Changsheng had not helped them, if he had not been present, the two youths from the Mount Li Sword Sect would have injured him even more severely.

He took out that gray string which he had received before entering the garden and shakily ignited it.

The dull green smoke rose up from that burning string and wafted over the river, gradually disappearing into the sky of the Garden of Zhou.

Chen Changsheng could faintly sense that as this green smoke disappeared into the air, it was producing a response from the space that separated the Garden of Zhou from the real world.

The laws of space were extremely profound, so logically, igniting a gray string was not enough to teleport a person dozens of li to the gate of the Garden of Zhou. So, what these gray strings most likely used was the inherent laws of the Garden of Zhou. There was even a high probability that these gray strings were a product of the Garden of Zhou, created many years ago.

The river slowly flowed by and the beaches on both sides slowly grew dry once more.

Although the young daoist was still unwilling, he knew that he had no other choice. Once his master left, he would also definitely have to follow him in leaving the Garden of Zhou. His cultivation and sword arts were simply incapable of opposing the experts in this garden.

With the slow passage of time, the gray string in the Clear Void Monastery master's hand gradually burned to nothing.

The river still flowed, the water weeds still floated about indeterminately.

Nothing had happened.

The master from the Clear Void Monastery still lay on the riverbank.

Shocked, Chen Changsheng asked in confusion, "Could it be that the gray string doesn't work?"

Zhexiu arched his brows, then he looked at the young daoist.

The young daoist stared blankly back at him, then he came out of his stupor. He took out his gray string and ignited it, his hands trembling from nervousness.

After a while, the young daoist's gray string had also burned out, yet still nothing had happened.

He pinched the remains of the string, his face somewhat pale.

His master's face was even more pale.

Liang Xiaoxiao's 'Mountain Spirit Splits the Cliff' move had been too tyrannical. In only two bouts, his stomach had obtained a terrifying sword wound that even now continued to bleed. If he could not promptly return to the garden's gate and be treated by the Orthodoxy priests, his life would really be in danger.

"Just what is going on here?"

The young daoist asked in panic as he subconsciously looked around.

The forest around the river was quiet and peaceful, yet now it suddenly seemed somewhat more sinister.

The events that had occurred on one side of the river had also finally shocked those on the other side.

Qi Jian, Liang Xiaoxiao, as well as the pair from Holy Maiden Peak came over, then Zhuang Huanyu came over as well.

"There won't be a problem, right? My master, what's going to happen to him? He's still bleeding, he's not going to die, right?"

The young daoist looked at Chen Changsheng. His face was filled with worry and expectation.

Liang Xiaoxiao looked at the wound on the Clear Void Monastery master's stomach and creased his brow.

If the Ethereal Opening cultivators that had entered the Garden of Zhou were humanity's hope for opposing the demons, how could the Saints let them so casually die? Back then when the rules for the Garden of Zhou had been established, the reason why they seemed so cruel and violent was because no matter how bitter the battle, or how vicious the people, at the very end the gray string could be used to directly leave the Garden of Zhou.

However, the gray string no longer worked anymore.

Chen Changsheng took out his needle box and he began to work on stemming the bleeding. Afterwards, he stood up and gazed into the distance downstream.

Chapter 252 - Two Field Doctors (Part One)

Downstream, he could see hills that the river winded its way through. Chen Changsheng could even make out the plain in the distance. It was the same scene that he had seen when they had arrived, but Chen Changsheng knew that something had definitely gone wrong in this world.

As Chen Changsheng was observing the garden in silence, Zhuang Huanyu prepared to leave.

"It's best not to go out on your own."

Chen Changsheng turned around and sincerely told him, "The gray strings losing their power means that something has probably gone wrong. It's best to first investigate what's going on, or else I'm worried that there will be problems."

Zhuang Huanyu did not stop. Arching his brow, he said, "The Garden of Zhou is only open for one hundred days. In here, every moment is precious. Don't tell me that you want me to waste my time for such a small matter?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "You observing the battle was also a waste of time, so what's the harm in wasting a bit more?"

"Fine". Zhuang Huanyu looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "If there really is a problem, then obviously, someone needs to go to the garden gate and see. From here to the garden gate is dozens of li, who is going?"

Precisely as Zhuang Huanyu had said, to those cultivators that entered the Garden of Zhou, every moment of time in the Garden was incomparably precious. For the people at the riverbank to make a trip from there to the garden gate and back, even if they expended true essence, it would still take at least an hour. Who would be willing to waste their time on this sort of matter?

Qi Jian seemed somewhat willing and was preparing to say something when Liang Xiaoxiao shook his head. Thinking of the heavy responsibility that their master had conferred to him, Liang Xiaoxiao thought that it was best to maintain silence.

The riverbank was very quiet, with not a single person responding. Zhuang Huanyu looked at Chen Changsheng and said derisively, "You see, not a single person is willing. Since you were the one to suggest it, why don't you go?"

Chen Changsheng did not directly answer, but he instead looked at the heavily injured Clear Void Monastery master.

Qi Jian understood his meaning and said, "I'll keep an eye on him."

Then, he turned to Liang Xiaoxiao and whispered a few words, his attitude very resolute.

"Great. I think you all can search in the surrounding woods, but it's best to not walk too far."

Chen Changsheng knew very well that of the disciples of the sects that entered the Garden of Zhou, the vast majority of disciples, just like the senior from the Holy Maiden Peak, had the responsibility of accompanying their juniors.

Saying these words, he began to walk downstream. Zhexiu followed behind, saying nothing.

Once he rounded the bend of the river and he made sure that no one could see him anymore, Chen Changsheng turned to Zhexiu and said, "I'm taking a trip into the woods. Wait for me here."

Zhexiu did not know what he planned to do, nor did he desire to reveal Chen Changsheng's secrets, so he indifferently nodded his head.

He entered the tranquil forest, climbed a bit of a ways up a mountain, then stopped. He took in the view of that distant plain, which seemed to burn under the sun as well as that mountain which seemed to extend into the depths of the plain. His right grasped the hilt of the dagger at his waist and he softly said, "Can you help me out by going to the gate of the garden and seeing what's going on?"

At some point, the Black Dragon had appeared on his shoulder. As it looked at that distant mountain, a strange light appeared in its eyes. It seemed somewhat perplexed, like it felt that there was something in that mountain calling to it.

"I have a premonition that the gate is closed and this garden is no longer connected to the outside world. So, whether you go or I go, they're both the same. Only you have to be careful that no one sees you."

Chen Changsheng turned his head to the Black Dragon on his shoulder and sincerely requested.

The Black Dragon withdrew its gaze from the mountain and gave Chen Changsheng two squeaks.

Somewhat vexed, Chen Changsheng answered, "I have some things that you disdain, but this dagger was given to me by my senior, so I can't give it you."

The Black Dragon gave him a cold look. The meaning was clear: you're not willing to pay up, yet you dare ask for my help?

Chen Changsheng thought it over, then said, "How about this? I promise you a single request... You know, right now I'm the Principal of the Orthodox Academy. In the future, I might be able to get my hands on all sorts of rare treasures."

The Black Dragon's pupils constricted. Apparently, it was quite satisfied with this answer.

With a sudden gust of wind, the Black Dragon became a fleeting image as it pierced through the air, accompanied by an earsplitting sound that tore through the air.

Not long after, Chen Changsheng emerged from the woods and walked over to Zhexiu. With a solemn expression, he said, "The gate is closed."

Zhexiu arched his brow, but he said nothing, not even asking how Chen Changsheng had been able to know that the gate to the garden was closed in such a short time.

Returning that stretch of riverbank, the rest of the people were quite suspicious of the information that Chen Changsheng had so quickly learned. A hint of scorn could be detected in Zhuang Huanyu's indifferent appearance, while Liang Xiaoxiao directly asked, "You say it's closed, so it's closed?"

Somewhat confused, Chen Changsheng replied, "If you believe it, then believe it."

Not waiting for any more questions from Zhuang Huanyu and Liang Xiaoxiao, Chen Changsheng squatted down and resumed treating the master from the Clear Void Monastery.

Qi Jian said, "I believe it."

Liang Xiaoxiao creased his brow, like he was befuddled as to the reason why his junior disciple was so confident in this rival of their Mount Li Sword Sect.

"Second Brother said, if something happens in the Garden of

Zhou, the person you could be most confident in was Chen Changsheng." Qi Jian explained.

Chen Changsheng was currently taking that master's pulse, so his finger was somewhat rigid.

When Chen Changsheng was leaving the Mausoleum of Books, Gou Hanshi had asked him to look after the Mount Li disciples. Back then, Chen Changsheng thought that Gou Hanshi had been asking out of courtesy, but he did not imagine that Gou Hanshi really meant it. For some reason, he suddenly felt that his shoulders had gotten somewhat heavier, and yet his mind became more relaxed. It was a very comfortable feeling.

After confirming that the master's wound was not about to quickly get worse, he stood up and had Zhexiu begin to prepare his medical instruments. He said to Liang Xiaoxiao and the rest, "I confirmed that the rules of the Garden of Zhou are still intact, only that there is some outside force that is causing this disturbance. In these one hundred days, the gate to the Garden of Zhou should open once more, it's just that I don't know when exactly it will open."

Liang Xiaoxiao creased his brow. "What sort of outside force could disturb a miniature world?"

Qi Jian pondered this question, then answered, "Either that person is sufficiently powerful, or they have an extremely good understanding of the Garden of Zhou."

Chen Changsheng nodded his head. "I believe it to be the latter."

Ye Xiaolian opened her eyes wide and asked inquisitively, "Who could it be?"

They all looked each other in the eye, but none of them said anything.

The people that wanted to mess with these several hundred human cultivators in the Garden of Zhou was obviously the enemy of humanity.

The enemy of humanity was the demons.

"We must be careful."

Qi Jian looked downstream at the open country and anxiously said, "We have to think of a way to quickly inform everyone else."

They were not sure, or perhaps they simply could not imagine, that demons had entered the Garden of Zhou. But it was true that a change had occurred in the Garden of Zhou and the gray strings had lost their effectiveness. In order to prevent the human cultivators from attacking too fiercely and inflicting irreversible damage on fellow humans when stealing treasures, it was necessary to transmit the news that the Garden of Zhou had closed as quickly as possible.

It was just that the Garden of Zhou was truly too vast. While several hundred human cultivators did not seem like a small

number, when spread out over such a large area, they seemed extremely sparse. In addition, since the vast majority of the cultivators had entered the Garden of Zhou to search for treasure, presumably many people would go into hiding. In this sort of situation, even occasionally bumping into someone would be a rare event.

The reason why this group by the river had all met was because that they were all thinking about the same thing: the Sword Pool. Whether it was the Orthodox Academy, the Mount Li Sword Sect or the Heavenly Dao Academy, they all probably had left records regarding the evidence of the Sword Pool. Thus why they had all journeyed upstream and come to this place. This was something that they all mutually understood.

As for this master and disciple from Clear Void Monastery, from the moment they entered the Garden of Zhou, they had been following the senior and junior from Holy Maiden Peak. At a certain level, it could even be called shrewd and calculating.

In the vastness of the Garden of Zhou, there were three mountain ranges that divided it into three great regions. The famous plain, whose depths no one dared to venture into, was situated in the middle. On the edge of the mountain range, which was also the edge of the Garden of Zhou, were several gardens. Those gardens were rumored to be where Zhou Dufu used to live in the past, thus making them the place most likely to hold hidden treasure. Thus, when cultivators entered the Garden of Zhou, the majority of them would first search that region.

Liang Xiaoxiao said to Qi Jian, "Those places are too far and going

there is too time-consuming."

Before he had finished his sentence, Qi Jian understood his meaning. Truthfully, everyone there had probably realized his meaning.

Apparently, the Mount Li Sword Sect had extremely strong information on the whereabouts of the Sword Pool, or perhaps over the past few decades, the elders of Mount Li had obtained some fruits from their analysis. So of course, Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian were in a hurry to leave.

In the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng would frequently treat Zhexiu, so Zhexiu was well-acquainted with the contents of that box. It didn't take long for Zhexiu to prepare all the items that Chen Changsheng needed.

Chen Changsheng paid no attention to what the two disciples from the Mount Li Sword Sect were thinking about. Taking the tools, he squatted on the floor and began to treat the master from the Clear Void Monastery.

The application of the copper needles had already stopped the bleeding. What he was doing now was sewing up the wound.

Ye Xiaolian glanced over, and she could not help but turn pale at the sight.

Even that young daoist from the Clear Void Monastery, who was

holding his master's hand, could not help but tremble.

As cultivators, whether it was exchanging pointers indoors or engaging in battles in the world outside, they had all seen blood before. But what they rarely saw was a metal needle weaving through the flesh of a human.

Once he had finished sewing up the wound, he packed it tightly with a clean cloth. Chen Changsheng had not yet finished his treatment, as he now began to use the copper needles to touch the meridians around the chest that had been damaged by Liang Xiaoxiao.

At this scene, everyone present had somewhat strange expressions, especially Senior Tong from Holy Maiden Peak.

Holy Maiden Peak's South Stream Temple as well as the capital's Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green were the two sects most skilled in medical treatment. A thousand years ago, amidst the fierce war between the humans and demons, one would always see the women garbed in white. In that war, they played an extremely vital role.

The senior had not imagined that today in the Garden of Zhou, she would be able to witness such an exquisite display of medical expertise. In addition, it was very clear that Chen Changsheng had not been trained in the Sacred Light technique of the Orthodoxy.

The riverbank was quiet, with only the sound of the water flowing by and the occasional muffled hum from the master from

the Clear Void Monastery.

Everyone looked at Chen Changsheng, not daring to disturb him.

Zhuang Huanyu did not enjoy this sort of atmosphere. Slightly arching his brows, he nodded at Liang Xiaoxiao then he began walking upstream.

Chen Changsheng spied this out of the corner of his eye, but he did not attempt to dissuade him as he had done before.

After not much time had passed, he confirmed that the master from Clear Void Monastery was no longer in any danger. He stood and looked up at Qi Jian and said, "I also have to go. I have to find other people. Just like you, I worry that the others don't know that the Garden of Zhou has closed. If a dispute were to occur, if they begin to fight, then it is certain that no one will back down. The ferocity of their battle will bring about problems, and people might even die."

Thinking that these words were directed at him, Liang Xiaoxiao's face subtly changed. He didn't understand that this was just Chen Changsheng delivering his assessment of the situation.

Qi Jian replied somewhat awkwardly, "We also have to leave for a reason."

"I understand." He turned to the pair from Holy Maiden Peak and asked, "Could I trouble you two to temporarily watch over them

for a while? I should be able to get back before midnight."

Senior Tong was somewhat at a loss. She did not imagined that he would put forth such a request. After thinking it over, she agreed.

Taking care of their ambushers, if she had not been a disciple of Holy Maiden Peak, she really would not have accepted this task.

Chen Changsheng gave them a grateful smile, then he and Zhexiu once again proceeded downstream.

The sun shined brightly, dispelling some of the eeriness of the woods.

In the southeastern part of the Garden of Zhou, there was a garden that was constructed against the side of a mountain. According to the legends, this place was where Zhou Dufu, in his middle years, enjoyed listening to the song of birds, thus he built this garden. It was given the name 'Mountainside Whispering Wood'.

The Mountainside Whispering Wood was not the garden that was at the entrance to the Garden of Zhou, but it was the closest.

Because every cultivator had to pass through that garden at the entrance when they entered the Garden of Zhou, the place had long been picked clean. Since there was nothing to find in that garden for later cultivators, the vast majority of this year's

cultivators would first visit the Mountainside Whispering Wood garden.

The birds happily sang out amidst the mountains, while the water noiselessly flowed through the garden. As for the viewing galleries, the overhanging eaves, the whitewashed walls and windows; in accordance with the iron law set down by the human cultivating world, besides magical artifacts and legacies, nothing else in the Garden of Zhou was to be touched. So even after the passage of several hundred years, this place still retained the atmosphere of seven parts serenity and nine parts nobility of the past.

Only now in a room in the depths of the garden, there was only fear and unease. The serenity and nobility had long been replaced by the scent of blood which rushed off into the unknown.

Around a dozen cultivators surrounded the scene and their faces were extremely unsightly.

A cultivator was collapsed on the floor. His abdomen had been run through by a sword, leaving a gaping wound around five fingers wide. His left hand was placed on the wound, attempting to hold it closed. Yet it could nothing to stop the blood from flowing. His intestines seemed to be on the verge of coming out. As he gasped his dying breaths, the gray string that he had grasped in his right hand had burned away long ago, leaving only ash.

The other cultivator's face was deathly pale as he continuously said, "I didn't do it on purpose, at most, I thought that my 'Perching Tong' move would just injure him! How was I to know

that his true Qi would freeze and he would be unable to lift his sword? I really didn't do it on purpose, and anyway... this gray string doesn't work!"

The severely injured cultivator's stomach had been run through and his blood flowed like water. It was easy to see that he was about to die. The faces of the surrounding cultivators grew increasingly unsightly. The thing that made them the most concerned was, why had the gray string lost its effectiveness. Was the only thing that all of these people could do was watch this person die?

At this moment, several maidens dressed in ceremonial white arrived at the Mountainside Whispering Wood, and the garden was filled with the sounds of respect and pleasant surprise.

One of the maidens did not enter the room. She stood on the gallery bridge, looking at the distant sun which seemed to be gradually falling towards the plain. In her silence, it seemed that she had realized something.

Chapter 253 - Two Field Doctors (Part Two)

As the sunlight shone onto the young lady's face, her delicate and pretty, yet far from being described as beautiful, appearance suddenly seemed to grow brighter and more beautiful.

As she calmly looked at the distant sun, she thought of all the matters that she had encountered after entering the Garden of Zhou. In her heart, she had probably finished her assessment.

At this moment, one of the maidens of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green came over to her and whispered, "That person's injuries are too severe, Senior... "

The young lady nodded and indicated that the maiden should leave first, she would come soon after.

The maiden from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green returned to room, then, disregarding the protests of the injured cultivator's compatriots, had everyone exit the room.

Only after this did the young lady go inside. Two of the maidens from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green were attempting to treat the injured cultivator, but his injuries were truly too severe. The commonly used treatment methods of the Li Palace were lacking in effectiveness. Despite the efforts of the two maidens, they were still incapable of stemming the blood spilling from the wound in the abdomen.

Seeing the young lady arrive, the maidens suddenly breathed a

sigh of relief and they hurriedly moved aside for her.

The young lady walked over to the injured cultivator, then after taking two glances, she raised her right hand and placed it in the air above the wound.

A faint green light fell from her palm. Like flowing water, except even gentler, it incessantly fell from her palm onto the wounded cultivator's body.

The gaping wound which had been spilling blood nonstop suddenly ceased bleeding.

Soon after, the beam of light falling from that young lady's palm changed colors from a joyful and refreshing green to a holy and dignified milky white.

The pure white beam of light touched the cultivator's abdomen, and the terrifying wound slowly began to close up.

"The Garden of Zhou... has a problem. I suspect that the gate to the garden has been closed. In a little bit, choose the fastest from amongst those cultivators to go to the gate and see."

That young lady stood up and said to the other girls, "After I leave, you all should light two fireworks. I believe that all the cultivators in the mountains and by the river should be able to see them."

Regardless of it was the Holy Maiden Peak or the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, on the battlefield, they both had always used fireworks to communicate. To cultivators as well as human soldiers, these two fireworks were hope. Although this place was inside the Garden of Zhou, when those injured cultivators whose gray strings had failed to bring them out of the garden saw the two fireworks, they would probably try and make their way to the Mountainside Whispering Wood.

One of the maidens of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green that was slightly older than the rest asked the young lady with some concern, "Senior, what are you planning to do?"

"I have some things that I need to do." The young lady calmly stated, then she turned and departed.

The maidens from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green could only look in silence as the young lady's back disappeared into the depths of the garden.

Only after a moment did people begin to discuss the miraculous event that they had just witnessed.

One of the maidens said in admiration, "That was the Sacred Light Technique, wasn't it? I couldn't have imagined that Senior, despite her young age, could have mastered the Sacred Light Technique to such a level! It seems to me that perhaps not even teacher would be able to do that."

"The latter was the Sacred Light Technique. At the beginning,

she probably used Holy Maiden Peak's Natural Light."

The maiden that was slightly older than the rest smiled. "Senior first studied at our school for a while, then she went to Holy Maiden Peak to cultivate. Growing up in both the north and the south, naturally she's not ordinary."

As the night approached, the Garden of Zhou became somewhat chilly. In the foothills, it was even colder.

The white robes of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green were somewhat thick, able to keep out the wind and protect against the cold. The young lady was not worried about those things. As she seemingly casually strolled through the mountains and fields, in reality, she was searching for the cultivators that had entered the garden.

She held the same view as Chen Changsheng and Qi Jian. An even more powerful force would still be incapable of changing the rules of the Garden of Zhou, so the closing of the gate was most likely a temporary matter. The problem lay in the fact that the sudden closing of the gate presented many dangers to the several hundred cultivators in the garden. These dangers came from the human cultivators themselves as well as from other places.

At the previous cliff, she had encountered a student from Star Seizer Academy. The student had not been injured from battle, rather he had experienced a problem with circulating his true essence and he had fallen off the cliff. Even a body that had undergone Purification was unable to resist the force of the fall from such great height and his bones had been broken in many

places. If she had not seen him, then perhaps the only thing that he would have been able to do was wait for his death.

The night gradually set in and the mountain forest grew somewhat gloomy. In the distance, one could make out the faint glows of bonfires. It would seem that many cultivators had realized that something was strange and they no longer feared attracting competitors. They were only thinking about finding companions as fast as possible, and right now any person in the Garden of Zhou could be considered a companion.

The young lady headed towards the closest fire, and her white robes fluttering lightly in the night.

In the darkness of the Garden of Zhou, the most eye-catching objects were the glimmers of the bonfires. It was just that some of the bonfires were very difficult to see, perhaps because they were too far away.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu walked out of the mountain forest. Chen Changsheng spied a bonfire on a hill not too far away and said, "We'll start with the closest. No need to rush."

Zhexiu said nothing. As a descendent of the wolf tribe, the trait that he lacked the least was patience.

Chen Changsheng quickly realized this and he felt somewhat embarrassed. Then he remembered something else. "There are probably still many magical artifacts to be found in the Garden of Zhou. Coming with me, don't you feel like you're losing out?"

Zhexiu replied, "And you? Are you telling me that you don't feel like you're losing out?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "When I think about how the Mount Li Sword Sect very likely knows the exact location of the Sword Pool and that Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian are right now heading there, and when I think about how even Zhuang Huanyu might have already found it, of course... I still somewhat care about it. It's just that tonight, there are most definitely many people that have been injured, even on the verge of death. I can't just leave them be."

Zhexiu stared into his eyes and gravely asked him, "Why can't you leave them be?"

For this wolf youth that had grown up in the cruel snowy plains, every kindness was a weakness. He really did not understand why humans as well as some demihuman... simply could not let things be.

"Is it a sort of woman's kindheartedness?"

Chen Changsheng pondered the question, then replied, "It's that I can't bear to leave it be."

After a moment of silence, Zhexiu replied, "The responsibility of an expert is to make themselves more powerful, so that they can better protect the weak."

Chen Changsheng honestly admitted, "... maybe I don't have the consciousness of an expert? Besides, since the Li Palace has handed these people over to me, I have to assume some responsibility over them. In addition, it seems that I'm the only that can treat injuries amongst these people."

Zhexiu said no more.

Chen Changsheng asked, "You still haven't answered my question."

Zhexiu replied, "Tang Tang paid in advance, so I'm your bodyguard."

Chen Changsheng thought about his friend who was still in the Mausoleum of Books, then he thought about the Yellow Paper Umbrella, then regretfully said, "Being rich is really great."

Zhexiu added on at the end, "In addition, I feel that if I go with you, I won't be missing out."

As they talked, the pair didn't slow their speed at all. In a short time, they had arrived at the top of that hill. They saw the bonfire, as well as the people beside it.

From their clothes, those two cultivators were likely from the south. For some reason, they had battled with each other, and the end result was that neither side had won and both of them were

covered with numerous wounds.

What most mystified Chen Changsheng was that these two cultivators were both sound asleep, the wounds on their bodies had already healed. If it were not for the bloodstains on their clothes, it would have been impossible to tell that they had been wounded.

He walked over to the two cultivators and took their pulses, then he opened their eyes and closely examined them. Lastly, he lifted their clothes to examine the state of their wounds.

Although the wounds of the two were not completely smoothed over, it was clear that they were clear of any major obstacles. In addition, their deep sleep was most likely because they had sniffed some Spirit-Pacifying Incense, which would aid in their recovery.

"A senior from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green has given them Desistance Incense."

Chen Changsheng stood up and said to Zhexiu, "Since there's someone else going around saving lives, we can relax a little."

Zhexiu shook his head, "It's not the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green."

Chen Changsheng's expression became a little strange. Thinking to himself, as a person well-versed in the Daoist Canon, he was very familiar with the handiwork of the Thirteen Divisions of

Radiant Green. For the wounds on those two southern cultivators to recover so quickly could only be accomplished by the Orthodoxy's Sacred Light Art. There were even the remnants of sacred Qi around the wounds. So why is it that Zhexiu said that this was not the work of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green?

The Orthodoxy's Sacred Light technique was extremely difficult to cultivate. The level of Sacred Light technique he had just seen was something that only a dozen or so bishops within the Li Palace could demonstrate. Therefore, he had guessed that the person that healed these two cultivators was probably rather advanced, which is why he had called her a senior. It was even very likely that she was a female instructor. It was probably the case that Chen Changsheng had not been paying attention closely enough when entering the garden, so he had not seen her.

"It truly was the Sacred Light technique that healed the wounds, but the smell of the spirit-pacifying incense is wrong. It's not the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green's Desistance Incense, but rather the Holy Maiden Peak's most rarely produced Stainless Dust."

Zhexiu expressionlessly said to him, "The first incense I have smelled many times, while the latter I have only smelled once. There is no way I would forget it, so there's no way that I'm wrong."

Only now did Chen Changsheng remember that while Zhexiu hunted demons in the snowy plains of the north, he would also often undertake extremely dangerous missions for the Great Zhou Army. Who knows how many times he had lingered on the edge of

life and death? There were probably few people more qualified than him to discuss these two holy grounds of healing that were the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green and Holy Maiden Peak.

"Knows the Sacred Light technique, and also carries the Stainless Dust on their body... who could it be?"

He said this out loud, but in his heart, he wondered, to have grown up in both the northern and southern sects, this senior would clearly be rather extraordinary. But would such a senior really remain in Ethereal Opening?

Zhexiu stared wordlessly at him.

Somewhat uneasy, Chen Changsheng asked, "Why are you staring at me?"

Zhexiu looked into Chen Changsheng's eyes and asked, "Do you really not know or are you just acting stupid?"

Chen Changsheng stared blankly at him, then understood, after which he continued to stare blankly at him.

One of the important reasons that which he entered the Garden of Zhou was to meet that young lady and then personally return the marriage contract.

It was only that so many things had occurred after entering the garden that he had actually forgotten the matter, forgotten that

she was also inside the Garden of Zhou.

To grow up in the sects of the South and the North, to cultivate the Sacred Light technique to such a high level at Ethereal Opening, and then to also carry the precious Stainless Dust. In these past years, it seemed as though the only person to match those conditions on the continent was only her?

Somewhat helpless, he said to Zhexiu, "It can't be, right?"

Zhexiu impassively replied, "It is."

Chen Changsheng said no more, instead, he turned to the dark mountains and fields. He thought about how she had probably also stood in this spot, stood by the same fire. For some reason, his mind felt somewhat strange.

"Let's go?" Zhexiu asked.

Chen Changsheng suddenly turned to the two southern cultivators, took out his needles, and he began to treat them.

Zhexiu was somewhat confused. Since Xu Yourong has already treated them, what need was there for him to do so as well?

Chapter 254 - Two Field Doctors (Part Three)

"Using the Sacred Light technique to stop the bleeding and mend the flesh, then using the Stainless Dust to pacify the spirit, is that enough? These two people still have clumps of true essence clogging their meridians. If they aren't cleared up, then after these two wake up, their cultivation might decrease by thirty percent. Some people think that if you just learn some methods, you could go treat illnesses and save lives, but that's truly inappropriate."

Chen Changsheng moved the needles like the wind while he muttered to himself.

Zhexiu looked at him from up high and said, "You could replace the words 'some people' for her."

After Chen Changsheng completed his task, he stood up and explained very seriously, "I'm not comparing myself to her at anything."

Zhexiu seriously replied, "I don't believe you."

Chen Changsheng felt that his face was somewhat hot, so he said nothing more. He prepared to wake up those two cultivators so that he could direct them to the riverbank where they could meet up with others.

Just as he was about to do this, he saw something that had been

drawn on the ground besides the fire. After careful examination, he realized it was a map, along with a simple set of words.

The words were written rather well.

He silently commented to himself.

"She wants them to go to the Mountainside Whispering Woods. It seems that there are a lot of people gathered there."

Zhexiu asked, "Do we need to go there?"

Chen Changsheng didn't even need to consider an answer before directly saying, "No."

Zhexiu asked, "Why?"

I.....still have things I need to do.....there are still lots of people.....waiting for me to treat them.....fine."

Chen Changsheng stood up and was quiet for a long time. He finally, somewhat embarrassingly, said "I'm still not ready."

The white ceremonial robes were especially eye-catching in the night. If it were spotted on an everyday street, it might have even frightened people. However, in the eyes of cultivators, these white robes were associated with the special message-delivering fireworks of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green and Holy

Maiden Peak. They represented the hope to live and the end of suffering.

Over the course of her journey, there had already been two instances where the young lady's arrival had been greeted with cries of joy, accompanied with hot tears. So when she saw how calm the cultivator sitting next to the fire on the grass slope was, she was momentarily out of sorts. After a moment, she understood why the cultivator was so calm. It was because the cultivator was in the midst of meditating.

As she drew close, she realized that the cultivator's wounds had already been bound up. From the angle and wrapping of the wounds, this was not self-applied treatment. She was planning to take her leave when she suddenly thought of something and squatted back down. She unwrapped the bandages and examined the wound.

This cultivator's wounds were probably inflicted by a magical artifact from the Temple Seminary. All around the wound, she could still see the so-called stardust that was always left behind by the Temple Seminary's magical artifacts. However, the stardust within the wound had been cleaned out by the same person that had treated the cultivator, and the wound itself had been sewn together by some sort of thread.

The young lady could not help but think that the person who had treated this cultivator was incredibly bold. All the Daoist Canon and medical classics contained information on these sorts of methods, but it had been a long time since anyone had actually put them into practice.

There was most likely no problem with the external wounds, but what she was really worried about was the meridians. Injuries inflicted by magical artifacts and injuries inflicted by swords were two completely different things. The sword injured the body while the artifact injured the essence. The magical artifacts of a cultivator were not as extravagantly flashy as swords. They killed by damaging the internal organs, especially the meridians.

After this cultivator's external injuries had been healed, he had been in constant meditation. Perhaps by now, even his sea of consciousness would have problems.

Her finger rested upon the cultivator's vein as she slowly inserted a drop of extremely pure true essence.

The sensation of the true essence entering the cultivator caused him to wake up from his meditation. Seeing this young lady so close to his face, he was so shocked that he subconsciously prepared to attack.

The cruel rules of the Garden of Zhou that had been set down by the Saints were truly made to sharpen the will of the human cultivators, thus improving their battle prowess.

That young lady cared not for those things and said, "Don't move, don't speak, close your eyes."

That cultivator did not know her, or at the very least, he did not know the current her. Yet, when he heard the voice that was akin

to a clear spring, he felt that it was a voice that he could absolutely trust. He subconsciously relaxed and closed his eyes once more.

After a while, the young lady stood up.

She did not continue to stay and strode off into the night.

The light of the fire caused her shadow to stretch out.

That cultivator woke up once more. He looked at her back, and his expression somewhat perplexed.

Previously in that graceful glance, he had seen a delicate yet very normal and very forgettable appearance.

However, why was it that when he looked at her back, he felt that she was so beautiful that it shook him to his core?

The young lady's expression at this moment was rather perplexed.

That cultivator's meridians were extremely free-flowing. The shocks and blockages that had been left behind by the Temple Seminary's magical artifact had all been resolved by that person.

Amongst the several hundred cultivators that had entered the Garden of Zhou, which one was best in the medical arts?

Who was the most well-versed in these methods? Who amongst Ethereal Opening cultivators would know enough about the meridians that they could perform such minute repairs?

Unlike Chen Changsheng, she immediately knew who it was.

So he still has some uses.

She silently commented to herself.

Hearing the sound of water, she had arrived at the river. Seeing the bonfire, she realized that she recognized two of the people there.

The two girls were also very surprised after seeing her.

Ye Xiaolian's eyes were filled with reverence while Senior Tong gave a smile of relief.

Everything could be changed about the self aside from the eyes. Moreover, she had not purposely changed anything about herself this time, so her fellow disciples were able to recognize her.

She shook her head, to which Ye Xiaolian and Senior Tong understood and said nothing.

She walked over to side of the master from the Clear Void Monastery and opened his bandages. As she glanced over the

wound, her eyebrows slowly rose up.

"He treated him?"

She asked Senior Tong.

Senior Tong had cultivated together with her in the South Stream Temple, so she naturally knew about the situation with Chen Changsheng. However, she did not understand the meaning of her words momentarily.

"Originally, I thought he still had some use, but who knew that he would treat him in such a haphazard fashion? He only treated the outside of the wound, but it's still bleeding inside. Does he not care about it?"

For some reason, the young lady was getting increasingly angry.

The master from the Clear Void Monastery was currently extremely weak, so he simply had no idea what was going on. His disciple was even more confused, but from the attitude of the two disciples from Holy Maiden Peak, he knew that the person who had arrived was someone he could not afford to offend.

The young lady stretched out her right hand over the master's stomach. Then, a pure and sacred light fell from her palm.

The Clear Void Monastery could be even more remote, but it was still associated with the Orthodoxy, so how could that master not

recognize the Sacred Light technique?

Believing this young lady to be an extraordinary and powerful figure of the Orthodoxy, the master was moved and hurriedly attempted to rise and pay his respects.

The young lady slightly frowned, then directly knocked him out.

The Clear Void Monastery disciple stood hesitantly at the side, not even daring to speak much, much less act out.

After learning art of healing from Daoist Ji, did he suddenly think he could cure everyone under heaven? Did he think that cultivators were the same as ordinary people? That a sword wound was the same as the common cold?

The young lady was slightly annoyed as she thought of these things. Turning to Senior Tong, she asked, "When is he coming back?"

Senior Tong estimated the time and realized that it was not long before the time Chen Changsheng had mentioned. She replied, "It should be soon."

The young lady stared blankly at her, then turned around and walked off into the night.

Senior Tong asked, "You won't wait for him?"

The young lady did not answer. She quietly moved on, causing several birds to cry out in the night.

Chapter 255 - The Sob Of The Zither Causes A Man To Die

As she watched the young lady disappear into the dark forest, Ye Xiaolian raised her head in thought. After a while, she could no longer suppress the question in her mind. Quietly, she asked, "Just who does Senior Xu like?"

Senior Tong smiled back at her. "If it were you, who would you pick?"

"If it were like before, of course I would pick Senior Qiushan, but now..." Ye Xiaolian answered very sincerely, then felt it difficult to continue for some reason.

Chen Changsheng was oblivious to the fact that his existence had delivered such a blow to this girl's perspective on life and love. Zhexiu and he were walking amongst the mountains and forests in the night, searching for cultivators that had been injured in battle and treating their injuries. Although Chen Changsheng had not expressed it at any particular place, Zhexiu had realized that whenever they met a person that Xu Yourong had already treated, Chen Changsheng would clearly spend an extra amount of time and effort on the treatment. Similarly, that young lady was also walking in the darkness in search of people to heal. Similarly, for inexplicable reasons, whenever she found someone that Chen Changsheng had treated, she would particularly become uneasy and stay for a longer time.

Cloaked in the darkness, the Garden of Zhou was very quiet. The dome of the night contained no stars, but the glimmers of fire

helped to somewhat disperse the monotony of the night. The young man and young lady moved between those earthbound stars. Perhaps it was because they were purposely avoiding each other, or perhaps because of the arrangement of fate, they never met each other despite encountering many people that the other had treated.

They were in different places, doing different things. They never saw each other, but they knew who the other person was. The bandage wrapped around a wounded cultivator's leg, the true essence left behind in the meridians, the sacred Qi that hung around the edge of the wound— they were like letters or even simple notes that passed on a message, telling the other side what had been done. There was also faintly a sense of comparing strengths, of betting against each other.

Similarly, neither of them knew the reason why.

At midnight, Chen Changsheng returned to the riverbank in accordance with his promise. Seeing the sleeping master from the Clear Void Monastery, he confirmed that she had been through here. After a moment of silence, he felt a faint sense of admiration. He had no way of taking care of those internal wounds. He could only support the wounded and let them slowly recover. There was truly no comparison with her methods.

Only, tonight he had treated about twenty or so people. She had probably treated about the same, or even more. Whether it was the Orthodoxy's Sacred Light technique or the methods of the Holy Maiden Peak, they were both extremely taxing on the true essence. To keep using her strength unsparingly to heal person after

person, would she be able to hold on?

The human cultivators had entered the Garden of Zhou to seize treasures. In accordance with the rules set down by the Saints, they were all completely unscrupulous. So even though it was just the first day, there had already been many fights. Cruel battles brought about bitter consequences. The fact that the gray strings had ceased to function had made those injured cultivators all the more afraid. Fortunately, she and Chen Changsheng, as well as several maidens from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, had treated dozens of people. At the very least, no one had died for the time being. As there were no casualties, the mood amongst the cultivators could still be described as calm. However, the desire for revenge was impossible to disperse, especially against the backdrop of the north versus the south. At any point, the situation could be thrown into chaos.

The first night after entering the Garden of Zhou was slowly passed in this nervous and silent atmosphere.

The dim light of dawn illuminated the plain and the mountain range that extended into its depth.

The early morning in the Garden of Zhou was no different from the outside. The rising and setting sun was also no different. Under the red warmth of the morning light, the mountain range seemed like the proud upturned head of a great dragon.

This place was the legendary Sunset Valley.

At the peak of Sunset Valley, an old man faced the morning sun as he played a zither. The sound of the zither was like sobbing, as if it were mourning for something.

Behind the zither-playing old man, a girl of ten or so years sat with her hands wrapped around her legs. She gazed vacantly at the newly born, morning sun.

She truly was gazing vacantly. Her indifferent countenance held no trace of emotion. She seemed somewhat pitiful. Regardless of how gentle the morning light was, it was still harsh on the eyes. However, what was even more miraculous was that she stared with her eyes wide open directly at the sun. Not to even mention any pain or aching, she did not even squint her eyes.

"Chen Changsheng's skill in medicine is truly exquisite. We don't even need to discuss Xu Yourong. In addition, their reaction was too fast. Last night, the Garden of Zhou failed to fall into chaos."

The zither-playing old man walked over to the girl's side and said, "My lady, the little wolf and Chen Changsheng are together right now. Let's go and kill them first."

The old man said this very matter-of-factly, as if to signify that he would certainly be able to kill Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu if he wanted to.

Only Ethereal Opening cultivators could enter the Garden of Zhou. In other words, no matter how strong this old man was, he could not be more than the peak level of Ethereal Opening. Chen

Changsheng was already at the upper level of Ethereal Opening. Although Zhexiu was only at the initial stage, his astonishing bloodline talent and the battle prowess he honed on the snowy plains meant that his true power was not far from the upper level. So where did this old man's confidence come from?

The little girl continued to wrap her arms around her legs and stare vacantly at the red light of the morning sun. She did not give any sort of reply to the question that came from the zither-playing old man.

Her lack of response was an indication of her disapproval. Silence had never signified a tacit agreement. Whenever the lady acted, it was always in a very upfront fashion. The old man understood this point very well and said admonishingly, "In accordance with the military advisor's plan, we were to avail ourselves of the chaos in the garden last night to kill the human cultivators. Since no chaos occurred, we should be moving on to the next stage of the plan."

The girl's expression was cold and her gaze seemed rather dull. As she stared into the rising sun, she said, "I want to kill her."

The old man knew what 'her' the lady referred to. The lady had risked her invaluable body in such a dangerous place as the Garden of Zhou for the sole purpose of killing that human woman. The old man continued to admonish her. "Xu Yourong is no normal human....."

He had narrowly avoided the words that were the absolutely taboo for this girl. He could not help but still be afraid, and it was only after he composed himself that he continued, ".....even if she

consumed most of her true essence using the Sacred Light technique last night, killing her still would not be good. According to the military advisor's arrangements, we should first kill the other people first, then kill Xu. Only in this way can we avoid any mishaps."

With the two words 'military advisor', the girl descended into silence. However, after a long period of thought, she still shook her head and said, "I want to kill her."

She needed to kill Xu Yourong. She wanted to kill Xu Yourong. She only thought about killing Xu Yourong. The other human cultivators were naught but trash in her eyes, not even worth a glance.

Awaking to the sound of water, Chen Changsheng felt his entire body ached. Last night, as he walked around saving lives, he had walked several hundred li at the very least. Even though his body was now incredibly valiant, he was barely holding on. The most crucial factor was that his mind was still exhausted. That rush of activity had been like a tide, and it had truly been difficult for his mind to bear.

The morning sun had risen long ago and five in the morning had long since passed.

Chen Changsheng got up and walked over to the river, using some of the chilly water to wash his face. Feeling somewhat more awake, he took the field rations that Zhexiu had brought over and began to eat silently.

Last night, the injured or solitary cultivators had, in accordance with Chen Changsheng's instructions, come one after another to gather at the riverbank. Now, as those people successively woke up, the scene suddenly grew much more lively.

After Chen Changsheng finished eating the rations, he drank some water, then sat back down so as to disperse the exhaustion that pervaded both his mind and body. Only then did he stand back up.

The wound on Senior Tong's shoulder had been treated by him last night, and at the present, she had mostly recovered. The Clear Void Monastery master's condition had also improved. Although he still could not walk, his life was no longer in any danger. As for the other cultivators, whether their wounds were heavy or light, they were all in an okay condition. After a night's rest, they could probably handle the journey towards the garden that sat right in front of the gate.

Chen Changsheng walked over to Senior Tong and softly relayed his plan for the day.

Senior Tong nodded her head.

Chen Changsheng seemed to hesitate, but was unable to suppress his question and asked, "She.....did she say anything about me? Or leave behind a message for me?"

Senior Tong thought about the frustrated monologue that Xu

Yourong had delivered at the riverbank last night, and she could not help but smile as she replied, "She didn't say anything that was particularly meant for you."

For some reason, Chen Changsheng felt both at ease and disappointed.

At this moment, a cry of surprise arose from the forest by the river.

Upon hearing this cry, Chen Changsheng, Zhexiu, and a dozen other cultivators quickly rushed to its location.

An expert of the Heavenly Bestowal Sect stood there, his face pale. At his feet was a middle-aged man whose face was deathly green. He had long since stopped breathing.

Dead.

Somebody had died.

"What happened here?"

"Could it be that Sect Master Fei couldn't hold on?"

"Could it be that last night, some person snuck into the woods and took advantage of the wounds Sect Master Fei suffered to execute some evil scheme?"

The forest resounded with angry and somewhat panicked discussion. As cultivators that had roamed the world— even if no one present had faced a life or death situation— they would, at the very least, not have been so mentally affected by death. However, the closing of the Garden of Zhou had cast a shadow on their hearts, not to mention that the middle-aged man was the Sect Master of the Heavenly Bestowal Sect. Although the Heavenly Bestowal Sect was an obscure sect of the south, he was still a Sect Master, moreover.....last night the wounds Sect Master Fei had were not serious. Relying on his cultivation at the middle level of Ethereal Opening, he should have been able to very easily make it through the night. How could he so noiselessly die?

Chen Changsheng squatted down by Sect Master Fei's body, put on the gloves that were handed over by Zhexiu, and opened the eyes of the deceased man. He examined the nose and mouth, then inserted a copper needle into the neck. Extracting the needle, he brought it up into the sunlight and closely examined it. His expression slowly grew grave as he delivered his conclusion, "It was poison."

With these words, the crowd grew even more nervous. Who had used poison? That person could sneak past so many people and stealthily poison Sect Master Fei to death. What did that imply? Did it mean that as long as the person was willing, he could fatally poison any person present? And the most important cause of their anxiety was: why did that person want to kill Sect Master Fei?

"It must be a shaman." A southern cultivator said hatefully. "Yesterday when entering the garden, I spied a few of their ilk. I don't know what the Li Palace and Holy Maiden Peak are thinking,

to let these people that love to use such strange things as the shamanistic arts and poison into the Garden of Zhou."

"Chen Changsheng shook his head, "Although it's true that poisonous plants were used, the poison is nothing like the plants grown in the south."

"Then whose poison was it?"

Out of grief and anger, the expert from the Heavenly Bestowal Sect did not care for Chen Changsheng's status. Staring at him, he shouted, "Last night, senior said he didn't need your treatment, but you insisted and then had us come here. In the end, he died! Who knows if it wasn't because you did something while you were treating him!"

At these words, the entire forest suddenly became quiet.

Chapter 256 - In The Pool, Sword Intent

The reason that the forest suddenly went quiet was not because the Heavenly Bestowal Sect expert's words had broken through the hearts of the crowd.

No one thought that Chen Changsheng used his treatment to secretly poison Sect Master Fei, because there was no logic behind this argument and no reason for such actions. Everyone knew that Chen Changsheng was doted upon by the Pope and supported by the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education. At such a young age, he shocked the world by becoming the Principal of the Orthodox Academy. No matter how they looked at it, his future prospects were limitless. In comparison to these prospects, there was no benefit that could be obtained from the Garden of Zhou that would make him commit such an act.

The silence was because everyone there was very curious to know, in the face of such an ill-mannered accusation, how Chen Changsheng was going to react.

Chen Changsheng did not give a single response. The redness around that Heavenly Bestowal Sect expert's eyes, because of him rubbing the grief-stricken tears from his face, were all seen by Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu turned around and walked out of the forest. Senior Tong and Ye Xiaolian came over with their faces filled with concern.

Chen Changsheng gave them a short explanation of what had happened in the forest, then he and Zhexiu took their leave from the riverbank, once again entering the vast world that was the Garden of Zhou.

Not long after he left, Senior Tong and two other well-known cultivators took the rest of the cultivators, each of them supporting each other, to that garden where the gate was. In the procession, another stretcher had appeared. The dead body of Sect Master Fei lay upon it. From time to time, the sound of crying would arise from the riverbank.

Standing on a large rock atop a cliff and seeing the procession move down the river, Chen Changsheng felt somewhat more relaxed.

"Your method of dealing with things is wrong."

Zhexiu expressionlessly continued, "When a disagreement occurs in your group, regardless of what method you use, you must always suppress it. Following orders is a necessity if you want to continue to live."

Chen Changsheng did not reply. He turned and headed back into the dense forest.

As the search and treatment of cultivators progressed, more and more human cultivators were beginning to gather together, dividing into three gardens, all of which were communicating with each other. The problem was that the Garden of Zhou would not

open in one day. Could it be that all these people would be content to stay put in these beautiful but treasureless gardens for the entire duration?

In the following two days, an even more frightening situation took place. One after another, several cultivators died in bizarre fashion. Regardless of who they were with, further investigation could find no motive. As time passed, the pressure on all the cultivators grew larger. Some would probably fall apart under the pressure, while others would become numb to it. However, an even greater number of cultivators would most likely leave the three gardens and enter the Garden of Zhou once more, in search of the magical artifacts and legacies that were incomparable treasures to cultivators. They were willing to brave these dangers because, in their eyes, to stay with their fellow humans was even more dangerous.

Indeed, many cultivators had begun to suspect that this was all the plot of the demons, but even now, they still could not believe that the demons were able to infiltrate the Garden of Zhou. It must be known that the gate to the garden was guarded by the Solitary Drunk under the Moon, Zhu Luo. It was also guarded by His Eminence Archbishop Mei Lisha as well all the priests of the Orthodoxy that specialized in identification. Even if it was the most enigmatic Demon Advisor Black Robe, he would still be incapable of mixing in the crowd and enter the Garden of Zhou.

Since the demons could not enter the Garden of Zhou, then the danger obviously came from humans... from amongst themselves.

Chen Changsheng dipped his legs into the chilly water of the

river and let out a sigh of relief.

Over these past two days, he had pushed himself across a distance of approximately a thousand li. For someone like him, this was an incredibly bitter experience. His clothes were caked with dust and his appearance was one of complete exhaustion.

In comparison, Zhexiu cut a much more valiant figure. It was like this wolf youth had no idea what the word 'tired' meant.

As Chen Changsheng gazed at the small white fish swimming in the river, he said, "I still don't think that there's a traitor."

Zhexiu replied, "Four people have already died by poison. Since we've determined that there are no demons in the Garden of Zhou, the poisoner can only be traitor within our own ranks."

This was a very simple and clear conclusion.

Yet, Chen Changsheng found it very hard to accept.

This war of humans allied with the demi-humans against the demons was a war of extinction. It was very rare for either side to produce a traitor.

"Although the war still continues at the border of the snowy plain, for the majority of the people on the continent, the war ended many years ago. Many people have already forgotten the terror of the demons, and they have forgotten the genocidal war."

Zhexiu coldly continued, "In the snowy plains, I met many deer people that acted as guides for the demons. For a traitor bribed by the demons to be amongst the cultivators that the entered the Garden of Zhou would not be unusual."

Chen Changsheng silently pondered this, then said, "The reason why I've never believed in the existence of a traitor is because right now, everyone is already beginning to suspect each other. I think that this sort of distrust is even more dangerous."

Zhexiu conceded that toying with the minds of humans had always been the most terrifying trait of demons.

The demons had no need to enter the Garden of Zhou. They only needed to cut off communication between the outside world and the Garden of Zhou. The traitor would fan the flames and commit some sinister acts, and then the human cultivators would be thrown into chaos.

This sequence of events had occurred many times throughout history.

Chen Changsheng continued, "The several hundred Ethereal Opening cultivators here are the future of humanity. Amongst them are many exceptional and powerful individuals. The demons can't have enticed that many traitors, so if these several hundred cultivators can not suspect each other, be wary of each other, or even confront each other; as long as their wills can remain united, the demons will never be able to succeed."

Zhexiu impassively said, "If this were so easy to accomplish, then you humans would have united this continent a long time ago."

Chen Changsheng remained silent.

In these past two days, especially today as he observed the Mountainside Whispering Wood, he had already confirmed that the wills of these several hundred cultivators had already dispersed.

He was the leader upon which the Li Palace had conferred a heavy responsibility, so he had a duty to take care of the Orthodoxy's northern sects. Gou Hanshi had entrusted his beloved juniors to him, which made that sense of duty weigh even heavier upon his heart.

Yet, if the will of the people had dispersed, how could he lead?

"As long as they're in the gardens, they shouldn't encounter any problems. All the people that have been poisoned died in the mountains and fields, so we don't need to worry about the people in the gardens. The first priority should be to quickly find the other people that are still outside."

Chen Changsheng took his feet out of the water and stood, soaking wet, on a rock. Staring off into the horizon, he could faintly see the other two sets of foothills.

He had already counted up the cultivators that had been found

and gathered in the gardens. From the original number of cultivators that had entered the Garden of Zhou, he was still missing one hundred.

"There are some people that don't want to be found by you. What then?"

Zhexiu expressionlessly continued, "Like Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian, Zhuang Huanyu, as well as the other upper level Ethereal Opening cultivators from the various sects; we haven't seen any of them."

Chen Changsheng shook his legs, then put his shoes back on and tied them tight. "Even if the demons really did buy over a few traitors, none of them would dare fight against those people."

Zhexiu said, "They're definitely keeping an eye on things from the shadows."

Thinking about the responsibility that Gou Hanshi had entrusted to him back in the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng said, "Let's go to the Sword Pool and see."

Even if they could not meet up with Qi Jian and Liang Xiaoxiao, it would be great if they were able to find the Sword Pool.

After rushing about for these past two days and nights, he felt that he was entitled to be somewhat selfish.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu departed from the riverbank and they walked into the forest.

They would let the other cultivators worry about the dangers hidden in the mountains, yet apparently, they were not worried about their own safety at all.

It was because they were youths. Although they did not display much passion on the surface, neither of them was lacking in self-confidence. As they set forth together on their journey, of course they would have no fear.

Just as the pair were setting off across the mountain, on the other side of the mountain range, the white-robed young lady was walking.

Although she was alone, she remained as fearless as ever, and her expression was calm. At some point in time, a bow had appeared on her shoulder.

She arrived at the river that she had come to at the beginning. Following the same route upstream, she came to the place where the master from the Clear Void Monastery had battled with Holy Maiden Peak's Senior Tong. On the riverbank, which Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had barely paid a glance at, was a blackened bloodstain. She continued to walk in silence, not saying anything for a very long time.

Those two had never been good at conversation, nor did they like it very much. The various conversations that they had in the past

two days in the Garden of Zhou could already be considered to be quite a lot.

Occasionally, the cry of a bird would disrupt the tranquility of the forest. These were caused by their footsteps disturbing the wildlife.

In the records of the Daoist Canons, Chen Changsheng had learnt that someone had once found the scabbard of ancient sword in this piece of forest.

Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian, as well as Zhuang Huanyu, had disappeared in the upper reaches of this river, further confirming his conclusion.

If there truly was a Sword Pool in the Garden of Zhou, it was probably in this direction.

For the Mount Li Sword Sect to want to find the legendary Sword Pool was the most natural thing in the world.

What Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu did not know was that the saying that no one had ever found a sword in the Garden of Zhou was, in fact, wrong.

Many years ago, the Junior Martial Uncle from Mount Li with the name of Su had found a sword and brought it out of the Garden of Zhou.

Only, for some reason, this matter had never been made known.

The volume of water in this river was not great. Especially as someone moved upstream and went past several tributary rivers, the strength of the flow grew much weaker, and the river became as clear and as shallow as a mirror.

However, this river was very long. The two had set out at dawn, and only when the sun hung high up in the sky did they finally reach its end.

As with many other rivers, this river ended at a cliff. From this cliff flowed the silver thread of a waterfall.

At the bottom of the waterfall, there was a deep pool. There was a constant deep boom as the water fell into the pool.

Zhexiu lifted his head and squinted his eyes up at the top of the waterfall, but he only saw the fierce light of the sun and the shallow layer of water on the cliffside, as transparent as colored glass. From this, he could confirm that this was the peak of the mountain.

"I'll go and take a look."

Without waiting for Chen Changsheng's response, he quickly rushed over to the cliff. As he approached it, he suddenly lowered his body, then with a whoosh, he turned into a dark shadow. Leaping up over a dozen yards up the cliff, he began to speedily zip

his way up the cliff. It only took him a few moments before he arrived at the top of the cliff.

Chen Changsheng viewed all of this from the bottom. He could faintly make out how as Zhexiu quickly ascended, his hands seems to emit a cold light.

Zhexiu's figure disappeared from the top of the waterfall. Most likely, he had gone to check the true source of the river.

Chen Changsheng withdrew his gaze and he turned his attention to the deep pool of water under the waterfall, at which point he had a thought.

This place was the summit of the mountain and the source of the stream, so the volume of water should not have been too great. The scene that he and Zhexiu saw was in line with their expectations.

The waterfall was very thin and its volume was very small, so then why was the pool into which it fell so deep?

He walked over to the edge of the pond and looked into water. He could only see the gloom, the bottom not visible in the slightest.

He calmed his mind, then he released his spiritual sense and began to explore the depths.

After his spiritual sense had traveled who knows how far, he felt

his eye begin to ache, like a thin leaf had blown into them.

He closed his eyes and began to shed tears.

There was a strand of sword intent.

Although it was faint and elusive, he was absolutely sure that it was a strand of sword intent.

Chapter 257 - Over There Is A Lake

Chen Changsheng stood at the edge of the pond in silence for a very long time. The strand of sword intent in his eyes continued to linger, and the pain in his eyes caused him to continue to shed tears.

At the moment, he seemed like an idiotic youth who, upon looking at their reflection in the pond, had descended into self-pity.

The sword intent, which had emerged from the depths of the pond, had made him shocked, amazed, and frustrated.

Could this very plain and unremarkable waterfall and pool be the legendary Sword Pool? Otherwise, how could the strand of sword intent emerge from the pool?

Yet, if it really was the case, how had nobody found it in these past several hundred years? It must be known that although this sword intent was elusive and hard to grasp, it was still very distinct.

His frustration arose from ignorance... his own ignorance.

The sword intent, which had emerged from the pool, was truthfully rather weak and imperceptible. Even a peak level Ethereal Opening cultivator would have trouble grasping the traces of its existence.

Only Ethereal Opening cultivators were allowed to enter the Garden of Zhou.

So for all these countless years, no one had ever been able to sense this strand of sword intent. Finally, in a certain year in a certain month on a certain day, a genius cultivator, who was innately close to the sword, stood at the edge of this pool. His eyes were touched by the strand of sword intent, alarming his mind. At this point, the first curtain over the legendary Sword Pool was finally lifted.

That person was Mount Li's Junior Martial Uncle, Su Li.

How was Chen Changsheng able to detect this strand of sword intent? He could because both his mind and body were pure, and his spiritual sense, while not enough to be described as unrivaled, was much calmer and steadier than the ordinary cultivator's. On that night in the Orthodox Academy's library, when he had been fixing his Fated Star, even the Divine Empress atop the Dew Platform had silently concluded this.

In this way, he was able to become the second cultivator, in the several hundred years' worth of cultivators that entered the Garden of Zhou, to sense the strand of sword intent in this pool.

Where did this strand of sword intent originate from?

Chen Changsheng had his spiritual sense dive deeper into the pool, but then he sensed that there was an oddity within the pool.

Deep in the pool was some sort of invisible pressure that obstructed the continued advance of his spiritual sense.

Standing at the edge of the pool, he caressed the hilt of his dagger, then he looked at the small Black Dragon, which had at some point appeared on his shoulder. He said, "Otherwise... "

The Black Dragon looked at him, its eyes cold and filled with scorn. The meaning was clear: I'm not your subordinate, for what reason should I be helping you with so many things?"

Chen Changsheng could not help but say, "How is it that you and Zhexiu are so similar? Everything you do has to have some sort of benefit."

The Black Dragon was infuriated at these words and its thin tail moved to and fro as it prepared to return. So brazen, to compare myself with some lousy wolf! It thought to itself.

"Fine, fine, I will agree to another one of your requests." Chen Changsheng said helplessly.

Only then was the Black Dragon satisfied. With a flick of its tale, it turned into a black shadow, and with a splash, disappeared into the chilly water of the pool.

After a while, the Black Dragon broke through the surface of the water. As the water splashed in the sunlight, its brilliance made it seem like a shattered crystal.

Chen Changsheng lifted his right arm to let the dragon rest on it.

The water fell from the dragon's scales, soaking his sleeve. It was somewhat chilly and it gave him an odd sensation.

From the information relayed to him by the dragon, Chen Changsheng realized that there was a cave at the bottom of the pool. It probably headed towards some place behind the cliff. However, the strangeness of the pool was that the deeper someone went, the greater the pressure became. Moreover, the pressure exerted was much more powerful than what was to be expected in the real world. Since the Black Dragon was only a spiritual soul detached from its body, it had only one percent of its original power, so it was unable to enter the cave.

For the Black Dragon to find that cave could already be considered as rather difficult. Any human Ethereal Opening cultivator would most likely be unable to do so. Chen Changsheng stood at the edge of the pool, sensing the weak sword intent and pondered for a very long time. Then, he looked up at the top of the waterfall, calculated the distance, and made a decision.

He let the black dragon go back and rest, then he headed over to the waterfall and began to climb up the cliff. His ascent was not as wanton and reckless as Zhexiu's. It was very steady and precise, using an extremely large amount of strength.

Passing by the top of the waterfall, he finally arrived at the top of the cliff. He took out a towel and wiped the water from his face,

then he realized what lay in front of him was a clear pool of water. The bottom of the pool was made up of yellowstone, and the flat surface of the water extended far off into the distance. There was probably another cliff several hundred yard away from which the water fell. In the middle of the pool, he could faintly make out that the surface of the water was undulating. That place was most likely the source of the water. Taken together, it made for a beautiful picture.

At this time, Zhexiu had concluded his distant exploration and returned. He shook his head, indicating that he had not found anything.

"At the bottom of the pool is a cave. It probably goes to some place in the mountain. I suspect... that the Sword Pool lies within."

Chen Changsheng stood by the waterfall, and pointed down at the pool, which now looked like the size of a fist.

Zhexiu walked over to his side and glanced down. "I'd like to express my doubts."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Then what do you think is over there?"

Zhexiu said, "The stories often say, that at a desperate impasse, when suddenly finding a path, the first sight someone sees upon entering the new world is that of a beautiful woman bathing."

"You're overthinking it." Chen Changsheng felt very speechless so he changed the subject. "It seems that there's an oddity at the bottom of the pool, making it so that we can't dive into the cave. We need to think of a way in."

Zhexiu took another glance at the faraway pool, then said, "It seems that you've already thought of a way."

"If we jump down from here, with the assistance of our descent, we might be able to fall directly at the cave's position."

Chen Changsheng did not mention that with the Black Dragon's assistance, he had already ascertained the distance between the surface of the pool and the cave. According to his rough calculations, there should not be any problems.

Zhexiu took another glance at the pool and frowned. "What if our lives are in danger?"

The cliff was too high. Even Zhexiu was not certain that he would not be knocked unconscious when he hit the water.

Chen Changsheng replied, "I should be able to hold on, I don't know if you can."

Zhexiu did not know that he had bathed in the true dragon blood of the Black Dragon, but he did know that his body was so strong that it might even better than that of one obtained from perfect Purification, so he was not worried.

Zhexiu's heritage was special, his purification was extremely successful, and from childhood, he had been engaged in countless cruel battles in the snowy plain such that his muscles and bones could be described as made of stone. However, he still had little confidence at jumping from such a height. He said, "If Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian used this pool to get to the other side, how could they have done it?"

Chen Changsheng had not thought of this problem and scratched his head. "Perhaps the Mount Li Sword Sect has some sort of strange method?"

"What about Zhuang Huanyu?" Zhexiu asked.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat stumped. "The Heavenly Dao Academy also has some sort of secret method?"

Zhexiu looked at him expressionlessly and said, "With your status and position in the Orthodoxy, do you think that if the Heavenly Dao Academy had some clue about the Sword Pool, Mao Qiuyu wouldn't tell you?"

Chen Changsheng had no response to his questions. Somewhat in a rush, he said, "Regardless, I can go through. Just say if you can or can't do."

As men, even not fully matured men, nobody could say the words 'can't'.

Zhexiu impassively replied, "See you on the other side."

With these words, he walked over to the edge of the waterfall and jumped without the slightest hesitation.

His figure quickly descended down the cliffside, dashing the waterfall into several jade-like strands.

Chen Changsheng could not help but be startled at this scene. He silently thought to himself, being so straightforward really catches one unawares.

Then he heard a boom.

A massive splash rose from the surface of the pool. Through the middle of the splash, the depths of the pool could be seen. This was a path along which Zhexiu had proceeded.

Chen Changsheng shook his head, took off his outer clothes and put them away. After making sure that the timing was right, he also leaped off the cliff.

As the wind blew against him, it was broken to pieces. As the water splashed up, it was broken into pieces. The whistling sound did not have time to reach his ears before it was thrown behind him.

He became faster and faster, so that in but a moment, he had already reached the surface of the pool.

There was no sound, only the distinct impact as he struck the surface and the resulting numbness in his face and neck.

After a moment, he began to feel the pressure and wetness of the water.

Assisted by the power of his descent, his body continued downwards, piercing through layer upon layer of obstruction.

The pressure of the water continued to increase. Compared to the depth that he had traveled, the pressure was much greater than what he had imagined, but it was still within the range that he could withstand.

Only now did he open his eyes and looked in front him, or to put it another way, he could see Zhexiu's figure below him.

Zhexiu was kicking his legs. It seemed that he was not having any problems.

Afterwards, he looked further past Zhexiu and could faintly make out a point of light.

In a short time, he and Zhexiu had arrived at the location of the point of light, but they found no sign of the cave that the Black Dragon had mentioned.

However, at this point, they had no other option. They could only use the remainder of the falling force to continue swimming downwards. After this force had gradually been used up, they began to use their hands to swim through the water.

After swimming for who knows how long, they suddenly realized that the pressure exerted by the water was gradually fading.

Then, they realized that the point of light was gradually growing larger, eventually engulfing their entire view.

Only then did they realize the true change.

They were not swimming down. They were swimming up.

Splash.

They finally managed to swim out.

They were still in the water.

They broke through the surface of the water.

This place was a placid lake. The lake was vast and the forest around it was verdant and lush. On the rocks of the shore grew all sorts of nameless flowers.

Right now, they were both in the center of the lake.

The depths of that pool was actually this lake.

The most miraculous thing was that when the bottom of the pool was connected to the lake, up and down were reversed, and heaven and earth exchanged positions.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu were truly shocked by this.

The scene they saw soon after made them even more shocked, so much so that their jaws were agape and they were at a loss for words.

In the middle of the lake was a rock.

It was right in front of them.

On the rock sat a woman.

The woman's face was charming and beautiful. It seemed that she had also just gotten out of the water. Her entire body was wet, and her pliable clothes pressed up tightly against her body, revealing her curves. Her mature and captivating body was completely exposed.

The extraordinarily beautiful woman was in the midst of

straining the water out of her black hair.

Her actions were very gentle. Her body was very gentle. Her complexion was very gentle. Her gaze was very gentle.

She was like a just ripened fruit, like the mountain spirit which the shamans of the south offered sacrifices to or like the beauties pictured in the murals in the capital.

To young men, she was at her most captivating period, and this was the most captivating scene.

Chen Changsheng thought about what Zhexiu had said before, and he had absolutely no idea what to do.

On the other side of the cliff, there actually was a lake.

In the lake, there actually was a beautiful woman that had just finished taking a bath.

What did this mean?

Chapter 258 - A Green Greener Than The Lake Water

Although it seemed like a long time had passed, in truth, it was only an instant.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu broke through the lake water and then they saw the drenched woman sitting on the rock in the center of the lake, combing her hair. Gawking at this scene, they felt rather silly.

However, in the woman's eyes, two heads had suddenly popped up in the middle of the lake. Naturally, this was incredibly horrifying.

With a shriek of surprise, the woman had lost her head in panic and leaped into water. Choking on the lake water, sometimes floating and sometimes sinking, the woman's beautiful appearance was filled with fear.

The lake water curled up onto her light clothes. A jade color could be faintly seen underneath the clothes.

Chen Changsheng had no time to carefully ponder about the details. He began moving his arms and swimming towards that place where she had landed.

Zhexiu said nothing, but followed behind him.

After he swam to where the woman had fallen, Chen Changsheng dived into the lake. Naturally, Chen Changsheng could not close his eyes this time. Within the lake water, the woman's clothes floated while still on her body. As she struggled in the water, her clothes also became disheveled. Chen Changsheng could see the whiteness of her neck, and could even faintly see even more alluring places.

Chen Changsheng had no reaction to all this. He thrust out his hand and took hold of her.

Having been suddenly saved, the woman instinctively came over and then tightly hugged him, like a small bear hugging a tree.

Chen Changsheng could clearly feel that his face had been buried in some place that was very plump and soft. His waist was tight in the grasp of two thighs.

This was a very rapturous position, even at such a urgent time.

If he were a normal person, he probably would have been absolutely incapable of saving anyone, and he might have even sunk down together with her.

Chen Changsheng would not. His right hand was clenched in a fist, ready at any time to come down. Perhaps he was preparing to knock this panicked woman unconscious, or perhaps it was for something else.

He held that woman and swam upwards. The woman calmed down somewhat and realized that Chen Changsheng meant her no harm and had come to save her. Because she felt embarrassed, she adjusted her posture.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and placed her face by his.

Thus, the two faces were right up close to each other.

Even in the chilly water of the lake, Chen Changsheng could still feel the warm breath that emerged from her lips and the heat that came from her body.

Zhexiu swam behind Chen Changsheng, his eyes were fixed on the woman. Previously, when he had just emerged from the lake, he had very clearly seen the insignia on the woman's waist and judged her to be a disciple from a secluded sect in the east.

However, this was not an indication of anything. He stared into her eyes, but just what he was looking for was unknown.

Finally arriving at the surface of the lake, the woman embracing Chen Changsheng's neck looked at Zhexiu. Her eyes were no longer as panicked, nor was there anything unusual about them.

This sort of calm was a problem.

Soon after, Zhexiu detected the trace of a smile in the woman's

eyes.

Lady, for what reason are you smiling?

Zhexiu wanted to ask her this question, but he could not ask, because there was no time to ask.

The woman's arms were wrapped around Chen Changsheng's neck, so her fingers very naturally pressed up against the area below his earlobes.

One of the most important blood vessels was located there, as well as the meridian that was connected directly to the sea of consciousness.

If that place was punctured, even if the Pope himself had personally come, he would still be unable to save Chen Changsheng's life.

Without a sound, the woman's fingernails suddenly began to glow with a bewitching green color.

The blue-green of the lake water could not obscure that shade of green.

The verdant forest on the lake shore, in the face of this green, seemed to suddenly lose all color.

The woman's nails lightly pierced inward.

Nothing happened.

The woman's nails cloaked in green light were unable to pierce Chen Changsheng's neck.

As if he had sensed nothing at all, Chen Changsheng swam towards the rock in the center of lake and seemed ready to climb onto it.

The woman's fluid glance seemed to flow slightly more, like she was somewhat astonished and shocked. Putting more strength in her fingers, she once again pierced down.

...Still, nothing happened.

The woman's mind was reeling with shock, because no matter how much she thought about it, she had no idea what was happening.

The smear of green hidden in her fingernails was the one of the world's sharpest magical artifacts. As long as it was not a Star Condensation cultivator, even if the cultivator had undergone perfect purification, she still would have only required the slightest pressure to break the skin.

Moreover, that smear of green itself contained the world's most frightening poison. Even the most powerful monster, when

afflicted by this poison, would not be able to hold on for long.

And yet... how was it that she was unable to pierce Chen Changsheng's skin?

At this point, Chen Changsheng finally turned his head.

They were both very close to each other, so much so that they could hear each other's breathing and see the reflections of themselves in each other's eyes.

His eyes were very bright.

So bright that it would cause others to get flustered.

The woman looked into his eyes, looked into those eyes that shined like mirrors, and looked at her slightly pale complexion. Afterwards, something that was extraordinarily rare for her happened: she began to feel flustered.

In Xuelao City, she had made countless demon generals dance in the palm of her hand. No matter what sort of unforeseen event she had encountered, she had never been flustered.

However, this time, she was very flustered.

Chen Changsheng's eyes were very calm, without the slightest hint of ridicule.

However, she felt that she was being ridiculed, that those eyes were filled with nothing but ridicule.

She was very angry and unwilling. Her fluid gaze flowed about once more, suddenly becoming incredibly lovely and pitiful.

Her beautiful appearance, her aggrieved expression, her mature and soft body, and her innately charming demon's magic; combined, they made up an incredibly alluring sensation.

Even if Chen Changsheng's heart was made of stone, he should have felt pity. At the very least, he would not kill her immediately, even more so since he was only fifteen years old.

As long as she could make it until he turned away for a moment, then she still had a chance; that was her thinking.

Sadly, reality never agreed with the plans of humans, and the same was true for demons.

Chen Changsheng had no reaction, like he had not even seen her face. He was not affected in the slightest by her demon magic.

He held her arms as tightly as iron bands.

The woman's color slightly changed. A harsh whistle burst out of her whips, then her clothes split apart like spider webs and an

extremely powerful Qi suddenly emerged.

If it was measured in terms of human cultivation levels, the Qi that she emitted was comparable to the upper level of Ethereal Opening, which was the same as Chen Changsheng. Moreover, the true essence that was released was many times more.

Chen Changsheng's body began to fiercely tremble, but he did not loosen his grip.

Holding her tight, he broke through the lake and leaped into the azure sky.

With one leap, he covered dozens of yards.

Afterwards, he landed on top of the rock in the center of the lake.

In this short period of time, he had used the Yeshe Step to make himself fall even faster.

Holding the woman tightly, he was like a stone, falling towards the rock in the middle of the lake.

Boom!

The rock in the middle of the lake suddenly split apart. At least one third of it collapsed and fell into the lake.

In the face of such powerful force, Chen Changsheng was no longer able keep his grip and he went flying back into the lake.

The woman was in even more miserable straits. Under that fierce attack, it was unknown how many bones had been broken in her nigh-perfect demon body. Her face was pale and two lines of blood streamed from the corners of her lips.

At this moment, another shadow came to attack.

Zhexiu had come.

Swish swish swish. Several streaks of light exploded in the air above the rock.

Afterwards came a yell filled with anger and pain.

Even if the woman's cultivation level had been greater and her true essence was even more powerful, she was unable to block Zhexiu's attack after having her sea of consciousness shaken by Chen Changsheng's attack and being caught off guard.

Those streaks of light had emerged from Zhexiu's fingers.

His fingers had grown several extremely sharp and metallic claws, which had left several extremely deep and bloody marks on the woman's body.

When Zhexiu roamed the world and hunted demons, he never needed weapons. His weapons were his two hands. He knew more than anyone else where the weakest points of the bodies of the demons were.

Seething with anger atop the rock, the woman gave an angry hiss. Her left hand shot out to press Zhexiu onto the rock. However, in a flash, the extremities of her fingers had been severed by Zhexiu's claws.

At this moment, Chen Changsheng had also come.

The blue-green of the lake suddenly turned a fiery red, like this was the place where the sun had chosen to set.

The evening clouds of the twilight enveloped the rock in the lake's center.

Wenshui Sword's Third Move, Hanging Sunset!

Borrowing the power of the sword, Chen Changsheng swiftly moved from the water onto the rock. Once his two feet landed on the rock, he concentrated the sword energy, then with a clank, the dagger left its sheath.

This was the first time that the dagger at his waist had truly left its sheath.

There was a crisp swish.

The glow of sunset suffused the sky, and the rock at the center of the lake had a warm red color.

Using some sort of demon technique, the woman had maneuvered her right hand until it was only half a chi from Chen Changsheng's throat, yet it could proceed no further.

That was because her right hand had been severed and had been sent flying into the air.

The woman gave a wretched cry, and then her body disappeared. Stepping over the water, moving hurriedly backwards, with a few steps, she had arrived at the shore.

Who would have thought that Zhexiu had long already gotten there before her?

With water splashing all about, Zhexiu swung his arm. In a flash of light, an additional line of blood appeared on the woman's ankle and she collapsed on the beach.

Chen Changsheng's sword pierced through the air, which the woman was barely able to avoid, only for Zhexiu to straddle her body.

Zhexiu's fingernails pressed against her throat. The tip of his sharp claws had already pierced an extremely difficult to find cartilage in her throat.

If he exerted the slightest amount of strength, her throat would end up being pierced.

The woman's pupils contracted and she did not dare to make another move.

Only at this point did her severed hand finally land in the lake.

Only now did that stream of blood, which followed her as she rushed across the lake, finally fall into the water.

The clear water of the lake, by the blood, was dyed a deeper shade of green.

The blood that had dripped onto the beach looked like patches of moss.

Her blood was actually green.

Chen Changsheng walked out of the lake, lifted up his dagger, and walked over to the two.

The woman did not have a single thread of clothes and she was being straddled by Zhexiu. This would have seemed to be very erotic, but it was not, because Zhexiu's fingernail were still tucked into her throat.

Seeing the green blood that flowed from that woman's severed wrist, Chen Changsheng was somewhat at a loss. He could not recall the color of blood from that member of the Yeshi tribe who he had encountered in the Orthodox Academy had.

This was not his first battle, but it was his first battle that was so fierce and where it mattered between life and death.

He had seen blood before, but rarely had he seen such a bloody scene.

Most importantly, this was his battle, and some of this scene had been caused by his actions.

Since he was but a youth, he still had not adapted much towards scenes like this, so he was momentarily speechless.

Zhexiu was very used to it, so he was very calm.

The woman's face was very pale and her expression was delicate and weak. Matched with her beautiful looks, it was easy for her appearance to arouse pity in others.

However, Zhexiu's face had no expression whatsoever.

The woman determined that she would be unable to entice the two young humans, so she finally gave up. She stared up at the azure sky. Her chest heaved gently up and down, and her beautiful face became pale.

The sunset glow over the lake had long dispersed. The sun remained suspended high up in the air. The wind blew from the lake, which was slightly chilly. The trees on the shore swayed in the wind, creating innumerable waves.

Chapter 259 - "You Carry The Pole And I'll Carry The Pot" Husband And Wife

The woman's clothing had been destroyed in the course of the battle and had fallen into the lake. Her silky skin was covered with tiny droplets of water. The tiny droplets faintly trembled against the chilly wind of the lake. It matched with her gentle curves that slowly moved up and down and made made for a very alluring picture—for a woman lying flat on the beach with two young men in front of her; this was a very shameful and embarrassing matter. However, her face was expressionless, not showing an opinion on anything. It was not because of her severed hand or the claws in her throat, but for some other reason.

The assassination had begun too quickly and had ended even quicker. The tide of battle had shifted so rapidly that it seemed to have never shifted at all, as if Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had known everything from the very beginning. Consequently, the preceding sequences of events seemed very natural and logical, only... just why was this the case? How were these two human youths able to see through her plan? How come the Peacock Plume was unable to pierce through Chen Changsheng's skin? Why were the actions of these two youths so fierce and cold-hearted, even surpassing her own ferocity?

Because of the wolf claws that were still sunken into her throat, she could not move her head, and could only move her eyes. She moved between Zhexiu's face, which was very close, to Chen Changsheng's face, which was by his side. The perplexion in her eyes increased by the second. The air of immaturity clearly still hung about the faces of these two youths, so how was it that they possessed such maturity above their ages and carried such deceit?

She could not speak, so she naturally had no means to voice her question and could only communicate through her eyes. It was often the case that the victorious side would give a very mild-mannered explanation of what had happened when they saw this sort of expression. This was the victor's privilege and honor, but Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had not given her a single explanation at all. They kept focused their attention on the surroundings, maintaining their vigilance. They had never been very good at explanations, and explaining had always been a meaningless affair. It served only as a waste of time, and to waste time was to endanger their lives. Not to mention, the matter had yet to be concluded.

"The scene of you sitting on the rock and combing your hair was truly very beautiful, but anybody could tell that something was up. Crucially, we had failed to grasp that Principal Chen had, for some reason, obtained a body that was even stronger than the one obtained from a perfect Purification. The Peacock Plume can pierce through the skin of any normal Star Condensation expert, yet it could not pierce his neck. From that point, your defeat was decided."

A voice called out from the forest. It was a very steady voice that would give people a sense of familiarity. It was like the auntie from next door that was explaining how she had cooked this pot roast. However, the color of Zhexiu's face suddenly changed as he stared into the forest. The fingers from his right hand that had been sunk into that woman's throat began to glow white, ready to kill her at any point. He seemed very tense.

His tension arose due to that voice, and even more so from the

'Peacock Plume' that had been mentioned by the owner of that voice. This made him think of only one person.

Chen Changsheng knew that Zhexiu had an innate sense for danger and an incomparable understanding of the demons, so naturally he also grew tense.

"After those two emerged from the water, Principal Chen used some sort of method to convince the wolf cub. He made you take action, then took advantage of your momentary lack of vigilance to counterattack, thus grasping the key moment. Although you are so skilled at speed and strength, displaying them to their fullest extent, Zhexiu was concealed behind you and waited for the opportunity to strike... You must know that the wolf is most skilled at patiently waiting, then making the fatal strike. You wanted to ambush and kill the two of them, but you were the one that ended up being ambushed in the end."

"Why was the sword so fast, it could directly cut off your hand? Because the true essence on its surface was too forceful. Why did your demon charm magic fail to entice him? Because his heart is guarded by the thousands of scrolls of the Daoist Canon. As for the wolf cub, everyone is an enemy in his eyes, so there is no difference to him between a man and a woman."

The voice continued to speak, full of praise and admiration. "Your cultivation was above theirs, yet they managed to suppress you in every respect.....truly extraordinary children. Even I feel somewhat intimidated. They are truly worthy of being named by the venerable military advisor as the future of humanity that must be killed. If we were to let them continue to mature, in a few

decades, who in Xuelao City would be their match?"

With the rustling of grass and fallen leaves, the woman who was speaking walked out of the forest, but she was not alone. By her side was a middle-aged man.

The woman's face was very composed and she had a gentle expression. Her clothing was plain and simple, and in her hand was an extremely large iron pot. As she ambled over, she continued to speak. She really did seem like the auntie from the next door. An even more prudent person would find it hard to hold any ill will towards these people or be too wary of them.

The middle-aged man's face was very commonplace and he seemed extremely well-behaved. From the start, he had said nothing. On his shoulders, he supported a carrying pole. The carrying pole was bent to an excessive degree and yet, had not snapped, making people wonder just what the pole was made of. At the same time, it indicated just how heavy the item being carried inside was.

Seeing the man and woman, Zhexiu's pupils contracted. He quickly placed his feet on the floor and stood up, then swiftly moved behind Chen Changsheng. The entire time, he still had his claws in the lady's throat. He was not using Chen Changsheng as a shield, but was rather preventing the couple from taking back the hostage.

This signified that even if he could kill the woman with the slightest movement, he had no confidence that she would not get taken away by the man and woman.

Just who were they?

Chen Changsheng looked at the two horns that sprouted from the man's head. The hand gripping the hilt of his sword felt somewhat moist. Besides the imperial clan, all mature demons would grow a pair of demon horns. As they grew in age and power, these horns would grow longer. For this man's demon horns to be so long, just how strong was he?

"Let me introduce ourselves. We are husband and wife."

The wife gave Chen Changsheng a warm smile and said softly, "I am Liu Wan'er of the Treasured Vase. I am virtuous and patient. In handling things, I am honest and attentive. He is my lover, his name is Teng Xiaoming of the Green Bull. He's somewhat slow, so in the past, I've even called him Chenwen (calm). He likes to spend the entire day at home doing nothing. He truly does not have any future prospects.

To say that he did not have any future prospects seemed to be a reproach, but the gaze she gave towards the middle-aged man was full of love and admiration.

The middle-aged man gave a hearty laugh but did not say anything.

Chen Changsheng kept his eye warily on the couple. His lips barely moving, he used an extremely soft voice to ask Zhexiu, "What treasured vase and green bull?"

Although his voice had been so soft, his words had still ended up in the ears of the demon wife called Liu Wan'er.

Zhexiu's face was somewhat pale. "If you connect the stars in a region, they become an image. The demons believe that every person is associated with a different star region, which influences their fate and character."

This was the first time Chen Changsheng had ever heard of such a thing.

Liu Wan'er smiled. "The rarer it is, the more value one places on it. We rarely get to see the stars, so within our culture, we place even more hidden meanings in the starfields. In this aspect, I've always felt you humans to be lacking respect, always wishing that this world was without the sacred Moon."

Chen Changsheng thought to himself that if he had not memorized the Daoist Canon, then he would have probably been like the rest of the people on the continent, not knowing that at the end of the snowy plains where the demons lived, a Moon existed.

Liu Wan'er's gaze swept past his shoulder and rested on Zhexiu's face. Her smile gradually faded as she asked gravely, "So you're that wolf cub?"

Out of the corner of his eye, Chen Changsheng saw that Zhexiu's face was somewhat pale. He could not help but feel somewhat

astonished. Just who was this husband and wife pair that had made Zhexiu react like so?

"The twenty-third Demon General, the twenty-fourth Demon General....." Zhexiu said with a hoarse voice, "How did you two enter the Garden of Zhou?"

Amongst the demons, there was an incredibly famous couple. Both husband and wife were Demon Generals, and their strength were tyrannical to the extreme. Moreover, it was rumored that they were extremely ruthless.

Right at this moment, they were facing that same couple.

Over the course of the years, Zhexiu had killed many demons. However, in the vast majority of these cases, he had been wandering the snowy plains, concealing himself for many of the days and then killing off solitary demon soldiers.

Demon Generals were not opponents he could defeat.

Even he, who had broken through into Ethereal Opening and gained a large increase in strength, had no hope of besting the husband and wife duo.

He did not understand how this powerful Demon General couple was able to enter the Garden of Zhou. It was well known that the Garden of Zhou only permitted Ethereal Opening cultivators.

Chen Changsheng had not even thought that the couple were both Demon Generals.

The husband and wife wore simple clothes and straw sandals. One of them held a carrying pole and the other carried a pot; no matter how someone looked at them, they were just like a couple selling food. Where was any of the bearing of a Demon General?

Only then did he suddenly realize that the middle-aged man was carrying a person in his carrying pole— a young girl. Her outer clothing had already been taken off, leaving only a white undergarment. However, it was tightly woven so nothing that should not have been revealed was revealed. The girl was very pretty. With her eyes shut and her eyelashes unmoving, she was probably unconscious.

Chen Changsheng thought of a certain matter. When the woman that had been heavily injured by Zhexiu and him was combing her hair on the rock, she had been wearing the robes of a secluded sect from the east... The very pretty girl who was unconscious in the carrying pole was most likely that sect's disciple.

Originally, the mountains and lake were incomparably beautiful, and that husband and wife seemed so gentle and even simple. However, when they appeared on the scene, the entire world suddenly became much more sinister. The unconscious girl in the carrying pole and the woman that had Zhexiu's claws buried in her throat made the scene take on an even stranger atmosphere.

The demon race was blessed by the heavens. Their bodies could be considered as perfect and they would rarely get sick. Likewise,

their meridians were perfect so they cultivate all sorts of different methods. They were different from humans. When they cultivated, they did not absorb starlight, but an even purer form of energy. At the same level of cultivation, demons were innately stronger than humans, let alone the fact that their opponents were two Demon Generals. Based on cultivation levels alone, it was enough for them to be crushed.

"Call for others." Zhexiu whispered.

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning. They had leapt from the waterfall to find the Sword Pool, and at the same, it was because they thought that Liang Xiaoxiao, Qi Jian, and Zhuang Huanyu would also be there.

In a two-on-two situation, their loss was guaranteed. If Liang Xiaoxiao and the others were to promptly appear, they had a chance of victory.

Only, how should they call out? Just yell out into the forest and the lake for someone to come quickly?

Just as he was seriously pondering this matter, Zhexiu's hand came from behind and offered him an item.

This was the Cloud-Piercing Arrow that was commonly used by the Great Zhou Army. It required the use of both hands to fire.

Chen Changsheng took the Cloud-Piercing Arrow and exerted a

little strength.

With a whoosh, a firework suddenly exploded into the azure sky. An incredibly sharp sound resounded in all directions.

Chapter 260 - The Heavenly Principle Of 'Demons Eat Humans, Humans Eat Dragons'

A single Cloud-Piercing Arrow.

Afterwards, the lakeshore returned to silence.

The demon wife called Liu Wan'er looked at the woman whose throat was being pierced by Zhexiu and sighed. "My lady, although you obstinately insisted on your own path and were injured because you underestimated the enemy, we can't just watch you die like this."

She turned to Chen Changsheng and the gentle smile reappeared on her face. She sincerely said, "Little friend, you see, what do you think about exchanging hostages?"

Along with her voice, that middle-aged demon man called Teng Xiaoming slowly turned around, bringing the basket that was behind him to the front.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu could clearly see the marks of tears still evident on that female cultivator's face.

Zhexiu was expressionless. It was his custom to never do anything meaningless on the battlefield, let alone throw himself into a dangerous position.

Regardless of the status of the woman that he currently had his fingernails dug into, as long as she was truly able to use the Peacock Plume, then she was qualified to serve as their protective charm.

As for that unconscious human girl who might have been the female disciple of that eastern hidden sect, what did she have to do with him?

Chen Changsheng was also not one to do meaningless things, but he had a difference in opinion. He believed that as long as this human girl would be able to live, this matter most definitely had meaning.

However, he also clearly understood that whether it was fighting or dealing with demons, Zhexiu by surpassed him in terms of experience. As a result, he maintained his silence as to not disturb Zhexiu's decision.

"Once we exchange hostages, you two can just kill us." Zhexiu said to the demon couple.

Liu Wan'er said to him very seriously, "I will swear on the name of my ancestors that you must die within the Garden of Zhou. However, I can also vow that as long as you agree to this exchange, I can give you a one hour head start. If I break this vow, then may the heavens punish me and the earth extinguish me."

Zhexiu's expression remained unchanging. "The promises of

demons are equivalent to the promises of humans, all lies."

Liu Wan'er calmly replied, "How could I make you trust me?"

Zhexiu responded, "The first thing you could do to make us trust you is to tell us what sort of person this woman is, to be worth honoring your pledge for."

Liu Wan'er glanced at her husband, then said, "She is Lady Nanke....."

"I don't believe you." Zhexiu did not wait for her to finish the sentence. "If she really was Nanke, then even if Chen Changsheng and I had been even more prepared, we would still be lying dead in the lake."

The word he said were like so, and his heart was also certain of it, and yet he was puzzled. Previously when he had examined that woman's hair, he had confirmed that there were no demon horns. For such a proud and powerful demon woman to face him and Chen Changsheng, underestimate them, and not even have demon horns, who else would it be other than the legendary Nanke?

Chen Changsheng did not know who Nanke was, but whenever that name was mentioned, the demon couple's faces grew very solemn and respectful, while Zhexiu's breathing became somewhat ragged.

"Those human cultivators in the Garden of Zhou, it seems to me

that it was you lot that poisoned them?"

Seeing Liu Wan'er with the pot in hand and Teng Xiaoming with the carrying pole on his shoulder, he suddenly thought of this matter.

Liu Wan'er did not respond directly to his questions. With a gentle and sincere gaze, she said, "From the time you all entered the Garden of Zhou, we knew your exact positions. The people we want to kill were also you. After we kill you, we will take our leave. If you want less people to die, then you might as well cooperate with us."

Cooperate? How should we cooperate? Cooperate by you killing us? Or was it suicide? This clearly preposterous matter, but when it was said so sincerely and seriously by her, it actually gained an indescribable type of persuasiveness. Chen Changsheng stared blankly at her and said, "For you to infiltrate the Garden of Zhou, how many people do you plan to kill? Just the two of us?"

Liu Wan'er gave off the feeling that she would say everything she knew, and that she would not stop until she had finished. She said, "The venerable Military Advisor said that you were the future of humanity, and so you must die. Besides the two of you, there are still other targets, but it's inconvenient to inform you of them."

Chen Changsheng replied, "The Divine State's Seven Laws sent two people.....Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian, these are definitely people you want to kill."

Liu Wan'er smiled. "Makes sense."

Chen Changsheng continued, "Although there are several other upper level Ethereal Opening seniors that have entered the Garden of Zhou, they are already too old. Their chances of breaking into the next realm aren't that great."

Liu Wan'er nodded. "Not bad, there is no way the venerable Military Advisor would care about such rotten and incapable seniors."

In the world of cultivation, no matter how one looked at it, the upper level of Ethereal Opening was already considered the realm of experts. Even if it took slightly longer to cultivate to that level, was it deserving of being called rotten and incapable? Chen Changsheng was somewhat at a loss for words as he said, "Since you are targeting younger people, then you've definitely been carefully observing this year's Grand Examination examinees..... Zhuang Huanyu?"

Zhong Hui and Su Moyu had remained in the Mausoleum of Books, and he could only think of Zhuang Huanyu's name.

"Who is Zhuang Huanyu?" Liu Wan'er knit her brow and turned to her husband.

Teng Xiaoming obediently replied, "Heavenly Dao Academy Mao Qiuyu's student. He's rather good."

Liu Wan'er chuckled and shook her head, then turned back to Chen Changsheng, "I don't even remember his name, so how could the venerable Military Advisor remember it?"

Chen Changsheng continued, "To be remembered by the famous Black Robe.....I don't know if I should be honored or scared."

Liu Wan'er smiled, then replied, "The venerable Military Advisor wanted to kill Luoluo, but then you came out of nowhere to destroy his plans. How could he forget you?"

Chen Changsheng remained silent.

"Let's quickly exchange hostages then." Liu Wan'er said with a sincere expression. "With an hour to run away, you'll be able to live another hour at the very least. If, while chasing after the two of you, we happen to come upon those two children from Mount Li, perhaps you can live even longer."

"If.....she really is Nanke."

Zhexiu glanced at the dying demon woman in his grasp and impassively continued, "Then regardless of who that girl in your carrying pole, what qualifications does she have to be exchanged with Nanke?"

Liu Wan'er replied, "You should be able to guess that this girl is a disciple of that secluded sect in the east. If we're discussing groups, then she's in the same group as the Pope. Are you saying that she

doesn't have the qualifications?"

Chen Changsheng said nothing, while Zhexiu indifferently said, "I'm not a member of the Orthodoxy, so I don't have any relationship with the Pope. In exchanging hostages, I only care about fair or not fair."

Liu Wan'er sternly replied. "Fair? That's reasonable.....you've destroyed all her clothes, so we can't give the clothes along with the girl."

As the words fell from her mouth, without her seemingly taking any action whatsoever, with only the sound of tearing, the undergarment of the unconscious split apart like butterflies and danced into the air.

In an instant, that girl's body was devoid of clothing. Her fair and youthful body was revealed, looking just like a white lamb.

Her arms wrapped around her legs, curled up in a basket; this picture had a sort of indescribable attractiveness.

Chen Changsheng angled his body so that he could not see it directly.

Zhexiu had no reaction. He stared right at it, as if he had seen nothing at all.

They were both alike in the cool-headedness, not showing the

slightest sign of panic.

Liu Wan'er continued to smile. Her expression remained gentle, but in her heart, she was somewhat surprised. After a moment, she slowly continued, "Only without clothes.....it's still not fair."

Chen Changsheng seemed to think of something and his expression changed. He was prepared to say words to stop her, but he was not fast enough.

An extremely beautiful blade glow appeared on the lake shore.

A scarlet spray of blood spilled out.

The pretty girl's right hand had been severed at the wrist.

The severed hand plopped on to the ground.

Teng Xiaoming slowly crouched down and picked it up, then turned to Liu Wan'er and said, "For tonight's dinner, should we steam it or fry it?"

This was the second sentence this Demon General had said today.

He was talking about eating human flesh.

As he said these words, he maintained his straightforward and

honest expression, as if he were discussing a very ordinary matter.

Liu Wan'er thought the matter over, then said, "It's better to boil it in plain water, it will be more fragrant."

She said this very calmly and casually, just like when she was speaking from the forest, as if describing how to cook pot-roast. This time she was describing how to cook a hand.

Chen Changsheng's face paled somewhat, and his body grew stiff.

Zhexiu remained calm. He knew from the rumors of the cruel deeds that this seemingly straightforward and plain Demon General couple were famous for.

In addition, on the snowy plains, he had also eaten meat that was forbidden.

Liu Wan'er chuckled, "You see, isn't it fair now?"

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had cut off the demon woman's hand.

Now, Demon General couple had severed that human girl's hand.

It seemed to be very fair.

In Chen Changsheng's eyes, this demon wife's amiable and sincere smile had suddenly become extremely frightening.

He looked at her in silence for a while, then said very earnestly, "Can you not eat human flesh?"

Liu Wan'er could only stare. She had thought of many ways in which these two human teenagers would respond to this scene. Perhaps they would put up a strong front and say they that were not afraid, or perhaps vomit in revulsion, or maybe coldly ignore it. However, she had never imagined that Chen Changsheng would so earnestly urge her to not eat human flesh.

She saw that Chen Changsheng was so earnest, so she also became more earnest than she had ever been.

In this world, there was some earnestness that was truly worthy of admiration.

She asked Chen Changsheng, "Do you eat meat?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Yes."

She asked, "What crimes did chickens and ducks commit?"

Zhexiu suddenly said, "The weak are prey to the strong."

Liu Wan'er smiled, "We are stronger than you humans, so why

can't we treat you as food?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "You are all intelligent. We can speak and communicate."

Liu Wan'er looked into his eyes, then said very earnestly, "But you humans once ate dragons."

Chen Changsheng was speechless. He really had not known that humans had once eaten dragons.

At this moment, he realized that the hilt of his dagger was trembling.

"I am a human, so I have to advise you to not eat human flesh."

After a moment of silence, he continued, "Just as if I were a dragon, I would prevent humans from eating dragon flesh."

"So in the end it's still a matter of perspective." Liu Wan'er smiled.

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "I would never eat a dragon that could talk, even if it would give me all sorts of benefits.....I think that, perhaps, the person who ate dragons could not even be considered a person.....at least in my view."

At these words, Liu Wan'er was quiet, and then said, "That

person may already not be considered a person."

As this housewife—the twenty-third Demon General—was recalling the past, Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu glanced at each other.

Afterwards, Chen Changsheng took a step back.

The two teenagers stood shoulder to shoulder.

Then, afterwards, Chen Changsheng used his right hand to grab onto his dagger and move it behind his waist.

An extremely thin black shadow emerged from between his fingers.

Chapter 261 - The Invisible Wing

This was the first time, ever since Chen Changsheng and the Black Dragon had gotten to know each other, that the Black Dragon had agreed to help without first negotiating some benefit. This was because that demon had stirred some rather unhappy memories. That giant iron pot made her feel especially annoyed, and when that demon woman brought up that man who had eaten dragons, it made her even more annoyed.

The Black Dragon left Chen Changsheng's hand, turning into a shadow that was invisible to the naked eye. It surged towards the center of the lake, then noiselessly dived down like a falling leaf. It easily followed that tunnel which reversed the sky and earth and returned to the chilly pool by the cliff. Bursting through the water, it flew towards the gardens.

With her current level of strength, she was incapable of influencing this battle. Chen Changsheng had given her the task of warning others and searching for assistance. In Chen Changsheng's opinion, it would have been good if she were simply able to find those seniors from the various sects that were at the upper level of Ethereal Opening, but she did not think this way. She knew very well just who amongst the human cultivators in these gardens was the strongest. The world within the Garden of Zhou was vast, but her luck was good. It was not much time before she found that solitary young lady dressed in white, walking on a cliff. It was just that, for some reason, she felt a little cold and afraid when she saw the bow and arrow on that young lady's body.

At this moment, Teng Xiaoming arched his brows and glanced off into the distance. As the twenty-fourth Demon General, he was

incredibly strong. Although the Black Dragon had left like lightning and without a sound, he had still managed to sense some movement. However, that Black Dragon was truly too fast, so fast that he had barely seen anything.

"Since Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian are also people you want to kill, then I understand now." Chen Changsheng said to Liu Wan'er. When he had previously used the Cloud-Piercing Arrow, the husband and wife pair had not elicited a single reaction, which he felt to be somewhat odd. Now, it seemed that this demon couple had purposefully ignored his call for help as to bring Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian over so that they could kill them all together.

Liu Wan'er looked at him and smiled, "If we can use the shortest amount of time to resolve all our problems, then that's for the best."

Chen Changsheng looked at that dying demon woman whose throat had been pierced by Zhexiu and still felt he had some misgivings that were impossible to resolve.

"I really don't understand where you two get the confidence from, thinking that you can win two against four."

Zhexiu expressionlessly said, "If this was outside the Garden of Zhou,, I would have definitely used this opportunity to escape considering the fierce reputation of the twenty-third and twenty-fourth Demon Generals. But since you used some sort of method to forcefully suppress your cultivation and enter the Garden of Zhou, then you can only use that cultivation to fight. At the very most, your power is still limited to that of the upper level of Ethereal

Opening."

Liu Wan'er calmly looked at him and said, "Self-confidence is the foundation of the strong."

"But did you know? Chen Changsheng is like me, neither of us are one for words." Zhexiu suddenly said.

Liu Wan'er arched her brows, then asked inquisitively, "This isn't something that's easy to see."

Zhexiu said, "You and him speaking so much, as well as this conversation I'm having with you; in reality we share the same goal as you.....we're all just buying time."

Liu Wan'er's brows went up even higher. "Why?"

"What you said is very correct. Self-confidence is the foundation of the strong."

Zhexiu continued, "Chen Changsheng is very confident that he is much stronger than the Chen Changsheng you have imagined. Coincidentally, I happen to think the same way about myself."

At this moment, a cold and proud voice rang out from the forest.

"Not bad, I also happen to think this way."

With these words, two youths dressed in plain sword uniforms walked out of the woods.

The disciples of Mount Li had finally arrived.

They had already prepared for battle. Their bodies were cloaked in sword intent.

They faced that Demon General couple, with their fresh and cool sword Qi that was dazzling to the eye.

A bit farther off into the forest, a clothed figure could faintly be seen. Zhuang Huanyu was probably going to arrive soon as well.

A huge change had just occurred in this scene.

Five young human geniuses against two demon experts; no matter from what angle, it seemed like a worthy fight. Moreover, the odds of success were rather high.

As Zhexiu had said, regardless of how tyrannical this Demon General couple were outside of the Garden of Zhou, the greatest strength they could use inside of the Garden of Zhou was that of the upper level of Ethereal Opening.

However, Chen Changsheng was still confused by one thing. Why were they still so confident?

Liu Wan'er's expression remained as gentle as ever, unlike the fearsome foe that Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian had thought they were confronting at all. Looking at Chen Changsheng, she said, "Even if we must battle, we should at least exchange hostages first."

She held the life of the female disciple from a secluded sect in the east in her hands.

The demon woman's life rested in Zhexiu's fingertips.

"You are the Principal of the Orthodox Academy. You're so young, even I think that the Pope is just messing around..."

Liu Wan'er looked at him and chuckled, "But you're still a member of the Li Palace. Presumably, you won't watch a fellow human die in front of you. The Longevity Sect is an orthodox sect of a profound school. Although they say that Mount Li is good at killing, that doesn't mean that you two can just watch as your fellow human dies. Wofu Zhexiu is a wolf cub who only needs to eat meat to live, but none of you can do that."

After she was finished with her words, Zhexiu glanced at Chen Changsheng.

In the snowy plains, he was a wolf youth who had given respect to no one. What Li Palace, what Mount Li? It all had nothing to do with him, so long as he could live and kill his enemies. However, after his journey to the capital, he had fixed his position. Within the Garden of Zhou, he was Chen Changsheng's bodyguard.

Chen Changsheng glanced at Qi Jian, and Qi Jian glanced at Liang Xiaoxiao.

"Exchange." Chen Changsheng and Liang Xiaoxiao simultaneously said.

Qi Jian nodded his head, indicating that this was how it should be. Zhexiu said nothing.

Liu Wan'er lightly waved her sleeve, and by some mysterious means, that girl in Teng Xiaoming's basket whose right hand had been cut off awoke.

Suddenly awakening, the first thing she felt was pain.

The girl's face suddenly became deathly pale. Two lines of tears fell from her eyes, but she bit down on her teeth. Besides an initial groan, she actually did not make another sound.

Seeing this scene, even Zhexiu was moved, as if he felt some pity and admiration.

Qi Jian quickly took off his outer garment and threw it over so that she could use it to cover herself.

Only then did the girl realize that she was naked. After the momentary shock, she looked hatefully into Liu Wan'er's eyes.

Liu Wan'er smiled, but paid her no attention otherwise.

"Please don't be confused." Liang Xiaoxiao then gave a most concise summary of the current situation.

"Many thanks to my fellow Daoists for their assistance."

The girl gave a slight bow of appreciation. Wearing a slightly tight robe over one's naked body, who would not have felt somewhat embarrassed? With her pure white legs pressed against the sandy beach, who would not have felt somewhat helpless? However, her pretty face showed no sign of panic. She was like some noble daughter, still wearing the clothes she wore inside the house.

The admiration in Zhexiu's eyes increase.

Qi Jian glanced over at him, then gave a mental snort.

That disciple from a secluded sect in the east who was like a noble daughter began to walk towards Chen Changsheng.

Liu Wan'er and her husband made no attempt to stop her.

It was hard to walk on the lakeshore. Moreover, she had just lost her hand and bled a lot of blood. This was her weakest moment, but she walked very steadily. She most likely did not want to add

any new variables to the situation.

After a while, she arrived in front of Chen Changsheng and the others.

Qi Jian took two steps forward and offered an arm in support.

On that beautiful face appeared a strand of shame and defiance.

Qi Jian realized what he was doing, then with some mumbling, withdrew his hand and stood to the side.

Chen Changsheng nodded at Zhexiu.

Zhexiu withdrew his sharp claws and grabbed the shoulder of that demon woman, preparing to return her to the demon couple.

A change.

A change that was absolutely going to happen.

A change that several people had been waiting in silence to happen for a long time.

In this moment, it finally happened.

The first place to change was at Zhexiu's location. Just as he was

about to toss the demon woman into the air, that dying demon woman who had seemed ready to drop dead at any moment suddenly opened her eyes.

Her two legs chopped towards Zhexiu's throat like two swords suffused with a cold light.

Blood was still flowing from the hole in her throat, and it still dripped from her severed wrist.

From the time she had been suppressed, she had not said a single word. Everyone had thought that she had no more strength to fight.

No one had imagined that she was waiting for that instant in which Zhexiu removed his claws from her throat.

The next change occurred in front of Qi Jian.

Just as he was mumbling and turning his body, the shame on that female disciple from a secluded sect from the east disappeared, and there was only indifference.

A frigid sword pierced through her robe. Carrying a terrifying Qi, it was thrust toward Qi Jian's throat.

The robe was originally Qi Jian's.

She had exploited Qi Jian's kindheartedness and courtesy.

The changes had begun, but naturally this was not all.

Qi Jian did not turn around. He seemed totally unprepared, about to die under this woman's sneak attack, but then a bright sword glow emerged.

The Mount Li Relic Sword.

Fair and honest, but absolutely not gentle. It carried an austere aura.

Although he was small and thin, Qi Jian's sword carried a massive Qi.

How could the crafty sneak attack overcome Qi Jian's accumulated power, his heartless and shameless sword?

Qi Jian's Mount Li Relic Sword flew towards the sword in the woman's hand, whistling through the air. With a swish, a line of blood appeared on her neck.

If that woman's movement techniques had not been so strange, and if Qi Jian's battle experience was not so sparse, then perhaps his sword would have beheaded that woman.

Even Qi Jian had prepared for a sneak attack, so there was no

need to discuss about whether Zhexiu had.

As that demon woman's two legs chopped towards him like swords, Zhexiu's hands were already waiting for them in the air.

Several muffled squelches resounded like a knife chopping onto a rotten, wooden board.

Zhexiu's ten fingers had all buried themselves into that demon woman's ankles, causing blood to spurt out.

The demon woman gave a miserable cry of anger.

Zhexiu's expression was indifferent. He extracted his fingers, then his body vanished. His two hands fell from the air, prepared to tear this woman to pieces.

Just at this moment, Teng Xiaoming put down his carrying pole, removed the two ropes that kept the baskets tied to the pole, and swung them around.

As if they were alive, the two ropes wrapped around the two women.

With a whoosh, those two women were narrowly pulled out of the range of Qi Jian and Zhexiu's attacks.

That woman who had been feigning as a disciple of a secluded

sect in the east maintained her indifferent and dignified expression, like a noble daughter. Only this time, half her chest was stained with blood, making her seem quite miserable.

The demon woman was even more miserable. From the time where she was combing her hair on the rock, she had suffered injury after injury. She could no longer hold on and directly collapsed onto the ground.

With a shashing, Chen Changsheng's dagger was sheathed.

Liang Xiaoxiao's sword had been unsheathed and rested in his hand.

The previous sneak attack and counterattack had happened too fast. Although they had prepared, they still did not have time to unsheathe their weapons.

It must be said that Teng Xiaoming was truly worthy of his title as the twenty-fourth Demon General. In terms of foresight, knowledge, experience, and strength, he was far above the humans present.

The lakeshore once again grew quiet.

That demon woman sat gasping for breath on the ground, not caring that she was stark naked. She stared hatefully at Chen Changsheng and the others, saying, "I won't accept this."

The woman wearing Qi Jian's robe arched her brows, an annoyed expression appearing on her face. "Don't mind this stupid thing. How did you see through me?"

The demon woman angrily replied, "Are you calling me a stupid thing?"

The woman shook her head, as if she was unwilling to pay her any attention. Looking at Qi Jian, she asked, "How did you know that I would attack you?"

Qi Jian glanced at Zhexiu and said, "I didn't know, he told me."

The woman turned towards Zhexiu and arched her brows. "Then how did you see that I was Nanke?"

Hearing the name Nanke, Zhexiu's expression became very grave. Observing her in silence, he confirmed once more and shook his head, "You're not Nanke.....I said before, if you were Nanke, then none of this would be necessary. You could directly come out and kill us, no need for any of these troublesome and annoying plans."

The woman creased her brow, "Then how did you see through it? I don't have any demon horns, and my blood is red."

That demon woman's ability to recover was truly frightening. After suffering such severe injuries, she only needed to sit for a few moments before standing up once more. Her face was filled with anger as she said, "Right! So what if my blood is green, I spent a

few days making a new haircut and cut off too much, so I couldn't completely hide my demon horns. It's nothing if you saw my mistake. But what about this girl? Her blood is clearly red with no horns to be seen, so how could you tell that she was one of us?"

Chen Changsheng and the others all turned to Zhexiu, not knowing how he had seen through it.

After a long period of silence, Zhexiu replied, "You did it too purposefully, as if you wanted us to see that her blood was red."

Zhexiu referred to how the Demon General couple had, without a word, cut off that woman's hand.

Liu Wan'er glanced over at the woman and smiled. "See, I told you that your way of doing things was more than necessary."

The woman gave Zhexiu a bewildered look. "Just this reason? No other evidence?"

When life and death are on the line, a single reason is enough." Zhexiu impassively replied.

The woman grew even more annoyed at those words. She thought that she had spent so much time painstakingly developing this stratagem, but why was the plan completely useless against these humans? She thought to herself.

The demon woman looked at her and jeered, "See, I said that

your head wasn't that bright, yet every day you stubbornly insist that I'm the stupid one."

The woman expressionlessly said, "If you weren't the stupid one, then you wouldn't have snuck away to make a futile attempt at one person killing two."

Chen Changsheng and the others all felt very strange.

That demon woman was extremely enchanting. Her entire body presented a mature and charming view. The other woman's expression was dignified, and her appearance was beautiful. She seemed like a noble daughter that had been strictly raised since childhood. Yet when these two teased and bickered with each other, they seemed very similar, almost like they were the same person.

Qi Jian felt even stranger. This was his first time seeing demons and his first time fighting with them. He realized that these demons also knew how to bicker and quarrel, just like his fellow sisters and brothers back in the sect. However, he soon realized, after sobering up, that this way of thinking was far too dangerous.

What had caused him to sober up was the transformation of these two women.

Their hands which had been chopped off suddenly grew back.

It was not anything frightening as regrowing flesh and bone, but

instead, at their wrists appeared a translucent, light-green hand.

Moreover, the seemingly spiritual hand was gradually becoming real.

Chen Changsheng was truly amazed. Although the recovery abilities of the demon body were truly great, no one other than the pure-blooded imperial clan could regenerate limbs.

Not to mention the fact that this clearly was not a unique demon art for regenerating limbs.

Zhexiu finally thought of something, and his face suddenly paled.

These two demon women indeed were not Nanke, they were.....Nanke's two wings.

"Have you two played enough?" Liu Wan'er looked at the two women and said helplessly, "If you two weren't competing with each other on every little thing, we probably could have finished everything that we need to do today a long time ago. Be careful, or when the Lady comes back from killing the true phoenix and discovers what you've done, she'll give you three years of punishment. Then we'll see what you do."

At these words, fear appeared on the two demon women's faces and they said no more.

Liu Wan'er turned to Chen Changsheng and gave an apologetic

smile, then said, "Do it."

Her black hair floated in the air and her sleeves madly moved about.

There was no sneak attack this time, only the use of strength to fight. However, it gave Chen Changsheng and the others a massive pressure instead.

Qi Jian grasped his sword, and his expression was cold and without fear.

Zhexiu remained expressionless. With his metallic and sharp claws, he once again attacked the demon woman.

The Qi at the lake shore was thrown into chaos, with sword Qi and demon Qi mixing together.

Chen Changsheng looked at Liu Wan'er, and his expression was grave.

Liang Xiaoxiao stared at Teng Xiaoming. His face was slightly pale.

In terms of cultivation, the two of them were higher than Zhexiu and Qi Jian, so it was only right for their opponents to be the two Demon Generals.

In this battle, these young cultivators could still fight back. If they could fight, it meant that a loss was not guaranteed.

Maybe the Black Dragon could even bring back an expert to help?

This was Chen Changsheng's plan, but he was wrong in one matter.

When Liu Wan'er had said "Do it", it actually was not aimed at him, but at someone else.

Amidst the flying sand and stones, a sword approached Zhexiu from behind.

The sword was very powerful and very insidious.

No matter how vigilant Zhexiu was, he would never have imagined that a sword would pierce him from behind.

With a squelch, that sword pierced his waist.

Blood began to spurt out.

In these few breaths of time, the demon woman flew over to his side.

Her hands glowed a dim green, then pierced his shoulder.

Her black hair scattered like needles that pierced towards his eyes.

At the brink of death, Zhexiu gave an extremely ruthless howl.

This wolf youth's eyes suddenly turned blood red.

Chapter 262 - The Sword That Breaks The Heart

The eyes reddened and the cheeks began to sprout hair; this was the transformation of the demi-human.

In a few moments, Zhexiu's strength increased several times and his body grew stronger to an unimaginable level. Although the demon woman's hands had already torn at his shoulder, it was unable to shatter his bones. At a crucial moment, the treacherous sword that pierced his waist could go no deeper.

The sword was pulled out with a whoosh, then chopped at Zhexiu's neck. Given the Qi at the edge of the sword, Zhexiu would still have not been able to block it even if he had completely transformed.

Qi Jian spotted this scene out of the corner of his eye and was shocked beyond belief, but his sword was currently entangled with the sword of the woman, and so he was incapable of providing assistance. His left hand grasped his sheathe and moved to protect Zhexiu's back. He used the incredibly sharp Mount Li swordplay in order to block that sword.

However, the sword floated like a spirit snake and, as if it were extremely familiar with Qi Jian's swordplay, inclined upwards and actually easily broke through Qi Jian's sword move. The second thrust of the sword had never been aimed at Zhexiu. Its target had always been Qi Jian.

On the lakeshore, another squelch sounded out.

Qi Jian's lower abdomen had been directly thrust through by that treacherous and extremely powerful sword. Blood spurted out violently.

In a flash, that sword was extracted like lightning from Qi Jian's abdomen. Afterwards, it inclined once again, this time thrusting towards Chen Changsheng.

The person's first sword had heavily wounded Zhexiu and the second had heavily wounded Qi Jian. It had come noiselessly and caught them unprepared, bringing forth extremely painful consequences. Would Chen Changsheng be able to avoid it?

Chen Changsheng finally responded to the sword which had pierced Zhexiu and Qi Jian. Using the Yeshi Step with his feet, he narrowly avoided the edge of the sword which approached from behind.

However, at that very moment, the attack of the Demon General couple also arrived.

Teng Xiaoming, his face expressionless, picked up his two baskets and hurled them at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng had been forced forwards by that treacherous sword, so he had no energy left over to avoid this attack.

The two baskets were like small mountains, smashing down towards his head.

Chen Changsheng's true essence swiftly flowed out. His dagger was unsheathed, after which an extremely wondrous flower bloomed, forming two branches that—in the most improbable of circumstances—pierced the two baskets.

With two successive tearing sounds, the two baskets fell into pieces and became two puffs of dust.

The carrying pole in Teng Xiaoming's hand smashed at Chen Changsheng's head.

If those two baskets were like mountains, then the carrying pole wielded by the twenty-fourth Demon General was just like a real mountain. It brought an incomparably stern shadow that completely engulfed Chen Changsheng's body.

Boom!

A giant crater appeared on the lake shore.

Dust violently flew about while the nearby trees crashed down one after the other. In a short while, several trees had crashed to the ground.

That demon woman gave a hiss. Taking advantage of Zhexiu's severe wound, she utilized her demon techniques to their fullest

extent. Her fingers glowed with a queer, green light as she launched a barrage of attacks against Zhexiu.

As for the woman with the dignified expression, there was nothing gentle about her attacks. Her sleeve blew about in the strong wind. From within, countless feathers could be seen, each of them possessing a powerful Qi, all of which began attacking Qi Jian.

Zhexiu's eyes were blood-red, making him seem exceptionally fierce. His two hands were grey shadows in the air, valiantly blocking that demon woman's powerful attacks. However, Qi Jian's abdomen had been run through and his injury were too severe. He had no more strength to battle. Under the barrage of that woman's attacks, he was struck down onto the ground. His face was pale, his expression fatigued.

At this point, the three human youths had already been pushed to the brink.

Liu Wan'er, who had not acted all this time, finally made her move.

Carrying that massive iron pot in her hands, she burst through the air with a terrifying clap. Landing at the side of those three human youths, she flipped her wrist, and that massive iron pot enveloped the youths in its shadow as it fell.

That iron pot was truly massive, so massive that it obscured the sky above their heads, like a dark cloud. If that iron pot fell down,

then Chen Changsheng and the other two would truly would be out of luck.

Just at this moment, in the deep crater on the lake shore where dust had still pervaded the air, a light suddenly burst forth, accompanied by footsteps that sounded like the beating of a drum.

It broke through the wind, giving off a mournful cry.

Wielding his dagger, Chen Changsheng emerged from the crater and stood before Zhexiu and Qi Jian, thrusting it forth.

He thrust towards that iron pot which covered the sky.

With a clang, a hole appeared in the center of the pot. With the ear-shattering sound of metal scraping on metal, Chen Changsheng's dagger pierced through the pot and continued forward.

The iron pot covered them like a black cloud, but now there was an extra area of radiance. Chen Changsheng's dagger moved through the light, giving off a glow of its own. It was like a ray of light falling from a gloomy rain cloud.

Swish swish swish swish.

Those were the stabs of the dagger.

Swish swish swish swish.

Those were Zhexiu's claws.

With a swish, Liu Wan'er's face somewhat paled. She rushed backwards, and her neck sported an extra streak of blood.

The demon woman groaned as she backed up. Her abdomen also bore some new bloody scars.

Qi Jian finally gave out. Covering his wound, he knelt down on the ground, with blood seeping between his fingers.

However, at the very least, he was still alive.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu were also still alive.

The two sides of the battle had suddenly been separated.

The lakeshore grew quiet once again.

Liu Wan'er gently rubbed the bloody scars on her neck. As her gaze landed on Chen Changsheng, it became much more serious. It was still as gentle as ever, but it no longer gave an amiable feeling.

Never in her wildest dreams could she have imagined that the dagger in Chen Changsheng's hand would be so sharp, it could

easily pierce through her magical artifact. Just what was the dagger made of?

Chen Changsheng turned his head to look back at Zhexiu. He knew that Zhexiu had suffered heavy injuries, so he could only hope that Zhexiu still had the strength to fight.

Zhexiu's upper half was covered with blood, but he still stood. The gray hair on his cheeks had yet to be fully retracted. He was gasping for breath, as if each breath was especially difficult to take. His eyes were abnormally cold.

Seeing Zhexiu's eyes, Chen Changsheng's heart also grew cold.

Liu Wan'er and Teng Xiaoming glanced at each other, seeing the surprise in each other's eyes.

Those three human youths had actually managed to withstand that round of genuine attacks. This had truly exceeded their imaginations. It must be known that before entering the Garden of Zhou, not even they had known about the existence of that sword.

"If you had listened to what I said before and fought them together, the wolf cub would have been dead a long time ago!" The demon woman that had once again been heavily injured by Zhexiu's fingers angrily exclaimed at the woman beside her.

That woman contemplated about Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu in silence, and then replied calmly, "If it were just the two of us,

perhaps we really wouldn't have been able to beat the two youths."

Chen Changsheng did not pay any attention to what they were saying.

Zhexiu no longer cared about who was Nanke.

Qi Jian was the same.

Because what they cared about was that sword, that treacherous sword.

They all looked at Liang Xiaoxiao, and each of them with a different expression.

Qi Jian's face was pale, and his expression was one of shock. He was incredibly heart-broken, somewhat despondent even. He muttered towards Liang Xiaoxiao, "Why?"

Liang Xiaoxiao's face was even paler than Qi Jian's. However, his face was impassive and he did not say anything either, even though the sword in his hand dripped with the blood of his companion.

Chapter 263 - Understanding People

No one had thought that the treacherous and cruel sword had come from their own side, that the perpetrator of the sneak attack was Liang Xiaoxiao.

Zhexiu had an incomparably rich experience in battle, and his temperament always had been cold and detached. Because of the environment in which Chen Changsheng had been raised in, he had always been cautious in handling his affairs. Thus, regardless of how enticing or pitiful those two demon women were, they had been unable to deceive the two of them. However, even the two of them could have never imagined that Liang Xiaoxiao would suddenly revolt.

From the Mausoleum of Books to the Garden of Zhou, Chen Changsheng had always felt that Liang Xiaoxiao had a faint sense of hostility towards him. However, Chen Changsheng had become acquainted with the Divine State's Seven Laws. Gou Hanshi was a sincere and earnest noble, while Guan Feibai was a fierce fencer, or perhaps a rival or enemy. However, he had never believed that these Mount Li Sword Sect disciples were lowly traitors, much less that Liang Xiaoxiao would actually be colluding with the demons.

The war between the humans and demons had already stretched on for nearly one thousand years. Whether it was the Zhou Dynasty in the north or the Longevity Sect and the other sects in the south, how many predecessors and fellow disciples had gone bravely towards their deaths? As cultivators, they should have understood even more clearly that this was a war of extermination. So why did Liang Xiaoxiao join hands so willingly with the demons?

Of course, the person most shocked by this was Qi Jian. His abdomen had been run through by Liang Xiaoxiao's sword. This was a severe injury, but what had been even more injured was his heart. He looked at Liang Xiaoxiao. His face was pale and his expression was frustrated. Even now, he still failed to understand. This Third Brother had grown up together with him, and cared for him every day, so why would he perpetrate such a vile plot?

Liang Xiaoxiao said nothing. His face was pale and a faint struggle could be seen within his eyes. However, deeper within those eyes was a mad sense of painful delight.

It was pain, and it was delight.

Chen Changsheng and the two others thought of many matters, many possibilities; however, in reality, only a very short time had passed.

The demons had always been cold and emotionless. Seeing that their plan had finally succeeded, and that Liang Xiaoxiao's sneak attack had gone off without a hitch, how could they have given them any time to catch their breaths or wait for justification?

Teng Xiaoming once again hefted his carrying pole against the three youths. With both hands grasping it, he smashed it towards their faces without pity.

The wind was suddenly broken into countless strands. The nearby trees were all knocked down as that terrifying carrying

pole swung down like a mountain.

Even if Chen Changsheng and the others were uninjured, it would have been very difficult for them to block a whole-hearted attack from the famously ferocious twenty-fourth Demon General, let alone their current disastrous situation.

Zhexiu's two shoulders were a bloody mess. In between the chaotic lumps of fur that still had not receded yet, dense bones could be faintly made out from underneath. What was even more frightening was that these wounds had been caused by that demon woman whose nails contained the Peacock Plume—deep within the eyes of that wolf youth, an extremely small tinge of green could already be seen.

The legendary Peacock Plume was a poison that could kill the most powerful monster. That poison was now beginning to wreak havoc in Zhexiu's body.

Qi Jian was in an even sorrier state. Blood continued to spill from his abdomen. Even using the very last of his strength, he could only keep his grasp on the Mount Li Relic Sword. He could not even stand up, so how could he fight?

Chen Changsheng seemed to be in a somewhat better state. He had come out of that pit with his dagger covered in dust and cut a rather sorry figure, but there were no wounds on his body nor blood on his clothes.

However, in reality, he only seemed to be in a better state.

Previously, in that crater where he had received Teng Xiaoming's first strike of the carrying pole, he still was unable to completely block it even though he had bathed in dragon blood. The bone in his left arm had already cracked, while several of his ribs had already fractured. Even more troublesome was that his sea of consciousness had received a massive shock, which he found incredibly hard to bear. His stomach felt smothered, and at any moment he could spit up blood.

How could these heavily injured youths possibly withstand this mountainous carrying pole?

After Liang Xiaoxiao had succeeded in his sneak attack, he had made a swift retreat. Separated by dozens of yards, he looked upon this scene in silence.

The demon woman's smile was like a flower.

The dignified noble daughter had a calm expression.

Liu Wan'er sympathized, then waited.

She waited for Chen Changsheng and the other two to die as expected.

Of course, Chen Changsheng did not want to die.

It could be said without a doubt that, from the age of ten, he was the person on this world who had least wanted to die.

For the sake of not dying, he had expended much effort, and had naturally made many preparations as well.

Everyone, including Qi Jian, thought that they were dead beyond a doubt. Een Zhexiu, who had walked at the border of life and death so many times, thought silently that this was it. However, Chen Changsheng got to work once again, and took out the item he had prepared beforehand.

It was a metal ball, and its surface was covered with lines like fish scales.

Chen Changsheng poured his true essence into the metal ball. The surface of the ball flashed, then it began to tremble as those scales began to split open.

A cacophony of metallic clicks began to resound from it.

The split metal ball transformed in a flash, forming the thin canvas of an umbrella, then the pole, and finally the handle.

This transformation took a very short time. When the handle fell into Chen Changsheng's grasp, the Demon General's powerful carrying pole had not even landed yet.

A rather old oil-paper umbrella had appeared in Chen

Changsheng's hand.

This umbrella seemed very ordinary and uninteresting, just like Chen Changsheng.

Boom!

This time, the lakeshore did not gain a new crater. Instead, it gained dozens of deep cracks.

That force had been dispersed in all directions. It struck against the pebbles, leaving very distinct scars.

Of the Qi that had arisen from that terrifying collision, some of it had been pushed deep into the forest, mottling the bark with scars. Countless birds that had been unable to escape in time fell miserably to the ground.

The dust gradually settled, and the echoing in the mountains behind the lake gradually faded off into the distance.

Chen Changsheng had not died.

The carrying pole had been blocked by the ordinary and unremarkable umbrella.

A yellow light hung down from the edge of the umbrella. Like a hanging curtain, it completely enveloped Chen Changsheng

within.

He stood in front of Zhexiu and Qi Jian.

Seeing this scene before her eyes, the demon woman covered her mouth with her hands. She shocked speechless.

Liang Xiaoxiao arched his brows and his expression became grave.

Liu Wan'er creased her brow, her expression one of thought, as if she had remembered something.

Only Teng Xiaoming's expression was as wooden as ever. His right foot took another step forward, his two hands lifted up that carrying pole, and he attacked once more.

The clouds above the lake were carried along by the carrying pole as it struck.

There was another boom.

The Yellow Paper Umbrella blocked it once more.

However, Chen Changsheng's face became even paler.

Back in Wenshui City, the Old Master of the Tang clan had given

this magical artifact to him as a gift. Zhexiu had once said that this umbrella could block the full-on attack of a Star Condensation expert.

Similarly said by Zhexiu, since the demons had used some method to forcefully suppress the cultivations of these two Star Condensation Demon Generals and send them into the Garden of Zhou, then Teng Xiaoming and Liu Wan'er could only display a strength at the peak level of Ethereal Opening at most.

Logically, the umbrella in his hands would obviously be able to block their attacks.

The problem was, how many full-on attacks from the Demon General could he block?

Using magical artifacts also consumed true essence. He had much less true essence than cultivators of the same level, so how long would he be able to hold out?

Most importantly, the area covered by this umbrella was not large. If the demon experts all began to attack, how would he be able to protect Zhexiu and Qi Jian?

There was no other way.

He had no means of protecting his companions. The problem would only get worse as time passes, so the only thing he could do was send his companions away.

Just as the Yellow Paper Umbrella was blocking the carrying pole, his right hand moved like lightning. He took several pills and stuffed them into Zhexiu's mouth. Simultaneously, he also stuffed a small item into his hands.

Those pills had been refined by the Li Palace priests under Chen Changsheng's specifications and were meant to detoxify. His medical skills were passed down from Daoist Ji, the person most skilled in the medical arts in the entire continent, so it could be imagined how effective these pills were. Perhaps they could not remove the Peacock Plume, but at the very least, they could help Zhexiu suppress it for a time.

As for that slightly chilly small item, it was a button.

Before leaving the capital, he had only brought a single button with him. Originally he had planned to use it in the Garden of Zhou to save his life when encountering some sort of danger.

However now, it seemed he had to give it to someone else to use.

In the Orthodox Academy, when Luo Luo had first gifted him this button, she had said very clearly that this button could at most carry two people away.

Carrying the umbrella and seeing those demon experts speedily approaching, Chen Changsheng did not turn around. He calmly said to Zhexiu, "Take him away."

It was a certainty that the demons' plan in the Garden of Zhou was not just this, but the series of events that had occurred at the lakeshore had allowed them to confirm that amongst the group of three, Qi Jian was their priority target. Otherwise, the demons could have come together and killed him and Zhexiu off first, instead of what was happening now. Instead, they had waited for Qi Jian to enter their fatal plot, at which point Liu Wan'er said those words and Liang Xiaoxiao made his move.

Zhexiu understood this point, though he failed to understand another. Even if Qi Jian had been the final disciple of Mount Li's Sect Master, it did not seem to be enough for the demons to view him so highly.

He also understood that when Chen Changsheng had given him this button, he had also given him the hope of living. However, Chen Changsheng had guaranteed his death by staying.

He also understood that Chen Changsheng would not take Qi Jian away, nor would he abandon Qi Jian. Thus, this left only a single possibility.

Simultaneously, he understood that he was heavily poisoned and had no strength to fight. Since he would be of no help to Chen Changsheng, it would have been better for him to take Qi Jian and escape.

What he understood the most was that Chen Changsheng had already made his decision. Regardless of what Zhexiu did, it would

all be meaningless, only a waste of time.

Without hesitation, Zhexiu hugged Qi Jian and simultaneously activated the button in the palm of his hand.

Resting in Zhexiu's bosom, Qi Jian's face was abnormally pale. His eyebrows were wrinkled, his eyes were closed, and his lashes were barely moved. He looked extremely pitiful, but he was not conscious of any of the events occurring around him.

A puff of green smoke appeared under the umbrella.

At the very last moment, Zhexiu stared at Chen Changsheng's back. He impassively thought, just who was the bodyguard here? If he could live past this day, then it would have seemed that he owed someone a life.

At the same time, the Demon General's third strike from his carrying pole fell.

The ground shook, causing dust to suffuse the air and obscure that green smoke.

Countless cracks formed on the ground, exposing new clay. It was as if this were a newly plowed field in the spring.

The dust gradually settled.

Chen Changsheng stood alone.

His left hand held an umbrella.

His right hand held a dagger.

His expression was exceptionally serious, preparing for his final battle.

Chapter 264 - A Courageous Path

"That was the Thousand Mile Button?" Liu Wan'er looked at the umbrella, then asked in surprise, "Don't tell me that's the umbrella that not even Su Li could afford?"

The war between the humans and demons was exceptionally cruel. At the dividing line in the snowy plains, things like assassinations had never stopped. In order to obtain the final victory in this war of extermination, both sides were willing to commit all sorts of crimes. As long as there was a chance, they would pay any sort of price. To kill members of the opposite side was an opportunity to nurture young geniuses. This was the reason why Zhexiu, who had been such a young age and was still in the Meditation realm, obtained such a famous reputation in the continent. It was why his solitary self was able to exist in the most cruel and dangerous place.

In order to protect their young geniuses and give them sufficient time to mature, the sects and schools of the human world would dispatch experts to protect them from the shadows, or gift them with life-saving magical artifacts, before sending out their most valued disciples to truly mature. For instance, when Tianhai Shengxue was battling in Snowhold Pass, the Divine General Fei Dian would often be hidden at his side. For young geniuses like the Divine State's Seven Laws, Zhuang Huanyu, Su Moyu, and Zhong Hui, they all had similar arrangements. The demons had chosen the Garden of Zhou to carry out their assassinations because the Garden of Zhou was very special. The human senior experts were unable to enter. The young human cultivators could only rely on themselves for protection.

Of course, those young human cultivators would certainly have life-saving magical artifacts. For someone like Chen Changsheng who was doted upon by the Pope, this should have been the case even more so, only... the number of magical artifacts on Chen Changsheng was truly somewhat excessive. Moreover, they were all rare and powerful. Whether it was the legendary Yellow Paper Umbrella, or the Thousand Mile Button that cultivators valued as much as their lives; in the continent, they were all considered top-ranked magical artifacts.

As for the seemingly ordinary dagger in his hand, it possessed an unimaginable degree of sharpness, which caused Liu Wan'er to fear it all the more.

According to their original plan, the demon experts that had entered the Garden of Zhou would use the rumor of the Sword Pool to gather their targets by the lake. With the help of a surprise attack from their human spy, they should have been able to kill Chen Changsheng, Zhexiu, and Qi Jian very easily. Having completed three-quarters of their mission, they would rendezvous with the Lady and then kill Xu Yourong.

Who could have imagined that, in the end, their meticulous plans would have been shattered by Chen Changsheng alone?

Zhexiu had been poisoned by the Peacock Plume while Qi Jian's abdomen had been run through. Presumably, his internal organs and meridians had also suffered injury. However, in the end, they had both managed to leave the lakeside, temporarily evading their deaths.

Liu Wan'er turned to Liang Xiaoxiao. Her gaze rested upon the cloud pattern threaded around his wrist. She then nodded her head.

She did not actually recognize this disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect and only knew that he was the Third Law of the famous Divine State from the south. She also knew that before she had entered the Garden of Zhou, the Military Advisor had said that this human would assist them.

Liang Xiaoxiao's face was still pale and his voice was somewhat shaky, but his tone was very stable, "I must confirm that Qi Jian has died.....everyone that comes to this place must die."

Chen Changsheng had used a precious Thousand Mile Button to let Zhexiu and Qi Jian escape. If this were the real world, then no matter how strong these demon experts were, they would still be unable to pursue them. Regrettably, this was the Garden of Zhou, where there was a natural barrier. Zhexiu and Qi Jian could have traveled a thousand miles, but they were still within the Garden of Zhou.

Crucially, Liu Wan'er could, at any time, grasp their whereabouts.

"I don't need to kill you. I'm very satisfied because I really like you."

She looked at Chen Changsheng with a gentle expression. "It's very difficult for me to like a human. You so earnestly urged me

not to eat human flesh so earnestly. Other humans, and even many of my fellow demons would have only detested or been afraid of us when they found out about the rumors regarding us. None of them would give us some honest advice like you. You're a very different child."

"It's a pity that you cannot continue to live, because that is what the Military Advisor has commanded."

With these words, she lifted up her giant pot with its hole in the middle. Her body abruptly disappeared, appearing again on the surface of the lake as she floated way across it. Teng Xiaoming had fastened the two baskets back onto his carrying pole and followed her.

Only the demon beauty, the dignified daughter, and Liang Xiaoxiao remained on the lakeshore.

Chen Changsheng looked at Liang Xiaoxiao and asked a question, "Why?"

This was something he really wanted to know, and it was also what Qi Jian wanted to know most. In the past several hundred years, very rarely had there been a case where a human served the demons, let alone the fact that Liang Xiaoxiao was of the Divine State's Seven Laws. His future prospects were incomparably broad and radiant. The demons could not possibly offer him benefits or prospects. No matter how one saw it, his betrayal made no sense.

Liang Xiaoxiao did not answer. He slowly raised the sword in his

hand, and his face was as frigid as ice.

"Leaving behind the three of us, would you think that we are underestimating you? I must tell you that we are all very curious about whether you have any more precious treasures on your body,"

The demon beauty said to him flatteringly.

The husband and wife had gone off in pursuit of Qi Jian and Zhexiu. It could be viewed as a sort of contempt, but Chen Changsheng did not think in such a way. The one behind the plot was that enigmatic and terrifying Black Robe. His countless deeds over the countless years had testified to the fact that the demon Military Advisor's plans were flawless. If the demons had left behind three people to kill him, then it meant that the three people would most definitely kill him.

"For the youngest Principal of the Orthodox Academy to die so quietly like this, even I feel somewhat disappointed." The demon beauty sighed.

The dignified beauty gave off a completely different atmosphere from the other demon woman, but when they stood next to each other, they actually seemed very similar, like twins.

Chen Changsheng could even faintly make out that behind their backs was a clear wing made of light, just like previously when the woman had grown a new hand.

A powerful and cold Qi exuded from this wing that had emerged from the backs of the two women.

Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense was exceptionally acute. He was very certain that this was not a power he could stand against.

What was more was that Liang Xiaoxiao's contemptible and insidious, yet still powerful sword was still waiting at the side.

Several of his ribs were broken, while his arm bones had who knew how many cracks. He had been on the verge of puking blood several times, but he had managed to force it back down. His sea of consciousness had been severely shaken, and now the true essence flowed through the formerly hardly-opened meridians even more slowly. On the surface he did not seem to be injured, but in reality, his injuries were rather severe.

It was very obvious that his enemies already knew this.

This was a battle without suspense, even if he had this powerful magical artifact or this extremely sharp dagger.

If the battle were to continue for a moment longer, then he would soon become unable to even hold up this umbrella or be able to keep a grasp on his dagger. So then what use were they?

However, Chen Changsheng had no awareness of these things.

With one hand wielding the umbrella and the other wielding the

dagger, his expression remained serious and concentrated.

Despair? No, as long as he pressed on, there would always be hope.

In the distant mountain forest, the figure seemed to hesitate.

If he could display his will and ability in this battle, perhaps he could inspire some courage in that figure.

Moreover, he was still waiting for the Black Dragon to bring back good news.

The white ceremonial robes lightly swayed in the mountain wind. The young lady walked silently through the mountain ridge. It was somewhat lonely, so she was tired, but her expression was as serene as ever.

Seeing the longbow on her back, the Black Dragon suddenly grew fearful. Although she had come to find her, she suddenly no longer wanted to approach her.

The Black Dragon's gaze followed the trail of the white-clothed girl, resting upon that mountain peak which thrust into the depths of the plain.

At this time, the sun was once more setting in the west. The mysterious plains began to blaze once again. The peak turned the color of blood.

Her spiritual sense felt the peculiar sensation that she had felt yesterday when looking at that peak once again.

She thought about going there. There was something calling her from the distance.

However, she did not dare.

Because at this very moment, a girl of around ten years old and a zither-playing old man sat at the peak of Sunset Valley in the splendor of the sunset.

The Black Dragon had very good eyesight, so she could even make out the childish air that still hung about that girl's appearance.

She also knew very well that of the fear that appeared in her heart, half of it came from the longbow on the white-clothed young lady's back, while the other half came from this small girl.

As a member of the world's most noble and most proud Black Frost Dragons, that she felt this fear and unease made her feel incredibly ashamed.

If she was in her original body—regardless of whether it was the white-clothed young lady, or the young girl and her zither-playing old man—she could have easily gulp them down in one bite. She would not have even needed any water to wash it down.

However, right now, she was only a strand of a dragon soul attached to a jade ruyi.

She did not have the power to participate in Chen Changsheng's battle against those demon experts.

As for now, when a new battle was just about to begin, she did not dare get any closer.

The young lady dressed in white continued to pass over the mountain ridges.

The girl with the cold appearance continued to wait at that mountain.

Regardless of how much time passed, they would eventually meet.

In the weeds that filled the mountain slopes, a depression suddenly appeared, which began to expand down the mountain. It was like there was a large rock tumbling down the mountain.

The thing tumbling down the mountain was no rock. It was Zhexiu and Qi Jian.

The sharp blades of grass and the hardness of the mountain rock did not leave any marks on Zhexiu's face.

Qi Jian was draped over his shoulders, dejected and weak. His black hair was in complete disorder and his small face was pale.

With Qi Jian on his back, Zhexiu madly rushed towards the direction of the setting sun, dripping blood all the way.

At this time, they had already passed through that lake which had reversed heaven and earth and arrived in the world at the other side of the cliff.

He did not know that the Demon General couple was chasing them, nor did he know that they could grasp his whereabouts at any moment. However, Zhexiu had always had an instinctive sense for danger, which made him exceptionally wary. It was like he could hear the footsteps of his pursuers, and even the strange sound being made as air rushed through the hole in the iron pot.

He had to go faster.

However, in the very next moment, he stopped.

Qi Jian opened his eyes with some difficulty and saw the perfectly straight path ahead. He weakly asked, "What's wrong?"

Zhexiu looked impassively ahead at the path before him, and asked, "Where should I go next?"

Qi Jian weakly replied, "How would I know?"

Because of their battle in the Grand Examination, he had always loathed this wolf youth and wanted nothing to do with him. However now, he was being carried on his back, which already made him feel rather wronged. Who would have known that this guy would actually ask a heavily injured person like him which way to go? Truly, absolutely useless.

"I can't see anymore, so from now on, you'll have to guide me."

Zhexiu's voice was very calm, devoid of any sort of emotion.

The light of sunset that reflected off his eyes was not red, but a deep green.

The poison of the Peacock Plume had finally made its appearance.

The sunset also illuminated the mountain path, making it seem all the more tranquil, and all the more long.

Chapter 265 - Wolf Charge

Because he had lost too much blood, Qi Jian was somewhat dazed. It took him a while to respond after hearing Zhexiu's words, at which point he instantly became much more clear-headed. His face became even paler. then, he turned his head with some difficulty so that he could see Zhexiu's face. While Zhexiu's face was as expressionless as ever, it was very obvious that there was no vigor in his eyes. Qi Jian's body instantly became very stiff.

"You.....can't see anymore?" Qi Jian's voice trembled and he was about to get off Zhexiu's back.

As if to indicate that he was not allowed to leave, Zhexiu's hands grabbed onto Qi Jian's legs like iron bands, giving Qi Jian no chance of leaving.

Feeling the heat and strength of Zhexiu's hands on his legs, Qi Jian became both ashamed and hurried, using all of his strength to try and leave. Zhexiu gave no response and allowed him to struggle. He stood like a statue as Qi Jian's strength faded away and his struggles died down. In the end, Qi Jian gave up and powerlessly draped himself on Zhexiu's shoulders once more.

This time, when he turned to Zhexiu, the expressionless face that aroused incomparable hatred in him, the face like a dead man that made him want to go far away, seemed to have another indescribable atmosphere hanging about it.

Yes, it really did seem like a statue; like a wolf, or perhaps a

youth, standing on a cliff and staring into the distance.

Unconsciously, Qi Jian's heart softened, and so did his eyes. When he saw Zhexiu's face, an expression of admiration appeared on his small and pale face. Then, for some reason, he felt very sad. Especially when he saw Zhexiu's eyes, he began to cry, his tears filled with grief.

Zhexiu remained cold and indifferent, as if he could not be influenced by what he could not see. He said, "If crying could solve problems, then I would absolutely be the world's number one expert in crying."

In the snowy plains, in his battles with the demons, there were innumerable problems concerning life and death that needed to be resolved.

Qi Jian felt deeply humiliated. He lifted up his arm and used the sleeve to wipe his tears, but he could not wipe it clean because the tears continued to fall.

Zhexiu's voice became rather hesitant. "Perhaps... you..."

Then he after a long pause, he said, "Don't cry, there's no problem."

It was very obvious that Zhexiu was no good at consoling others, and even worse at sweet-talking. So while his manner of speaking seemed stiff, it felt even more sincere because of this.

Qi Jian rubbed his nose, then gave an unhappy grunt of agreement, though it was not clear who this unhappiness was directed to. Then he softly said, "Then.....let's go."

Zhexiu looked at the darkness before him and composed himself. He then said, "We should continue in the direction of the Mountainside Whispering Wood."

Supporting himself on Zhexiu's shoulder, Qi Jian laboriously lifted his head and looked at the ramrod mountain path in front of them. "Continue straight forward for four hundred yards, then turn right. I'll tell you when it's time."

Without hesitation, Zhexiu grabbed tightly onto Qi Jian's legs, then began proceeding forwards. He harbored not a single doubt about Qi Jian's words.

This made Qi Jian feel both moved and puzzled.

The mountain wind blew across Zhexiu's face, but he had already closed his eyes.

Then the mountain wind blew across Qi Jian's small face.

That wind seemed to carry a sort of heat with it.

Qi Jian felt it was somewhat warm, and somewhat calming.

In the mountains of the Garden of Zhou, the sound of footsteps continuously resounded. It was accompanied by Qi Jian's clear but weak directions, followed by Zhexiu's calm and indifferent replies.

"Slower, there's a hole up ahead."

"A small stream, two yards, and in front of us is the beach."

"Are you okay?"

"Let's go faster."

"But....."

"There is no 'but'."

"Careful, don't run into that tree."

In Zhexiu's view, they had to find the other human cultivators in the Garden of Zhou as quickly as possible. However, they had run so many dozens of miles and had not met a single person. Last night, the vast majority of the human cultivators had already gathered in those three gardens, in accordance with Chen Changsheng and the white-clothed young lady's instructions.

Now that he thought about it, this had probably been long taken into account by that legendary Military Advisor.

Human cultivators entered the Garden of Zhou for the purpose of vying for magical artifacts and legacies, so if the Garden of Zhou was to be cut off from the outside world, there would inevitably be internal strife. Even if there was a person that succeeded in stemming the chaos, the human cultivators would undoubtedly congregate in some place. Meanwhile, for Zhexiu and the Mount Li Sword Sect disciples, these assassination targets would be even more likely to go off on their own.

Zhexiu and Qi Jian stopped at a cliff. The distance from the closest place the humans had gathered, the Mountainside Whispering Wood, was still dozens of miles.

On the hillside behind them, they could already make out two shadows stretched long by the setting sun.

The Demon General couple had already caught up to them. He was still wielding his carrying pole, while she was still carrying around that big iron pot. It looked like they were moving to a new home, but in reality, their speed was dreadfully fast.

Qi Jian gave a painful cough and his small face grew even paler. He reported, "Southwest, at the Guizhen Star, approximately.....six, no, five miles."

For them, the shadows of that Demon General couple on the hillside were like the shadows of death. They had to find a way to break away from them.

"They stopped." Qi Jian said with some astonishment.

Zhexiu replied, "They want to see which way we're going to go."

Although he could not see his surroundings, over the past two days, he had walked the surrounding mountains of the Garden of Zhou many times with Chen Changsheng and inscribed the geography and the environment into his heart. If they continued on their present plan to go to the Mountainside Whispering Wood and meet up with the other human cultivators, then the Demon General couple only needed to change their course slightly and cut through a forest to intercept them.

In silence, Zhexiu estimated the distance between them and the couple, then decided that there was no way they were going to make it to the Mountainside Whispering Wood.

He faintly recalled someone on the lakeshore apparently saying that the demons could grasp their location at any time.

Even if they could not grasp their position, it seemed that this couple were truly worthy of their titles as Demon Generals. It was clearly two chasing two, but they had used strategy and tactics. This chase and flight had persisted for a few hours now, but they had gotten no closer to the Mountainside Whispering Wood. Rather, they were being pressured farther and farther away.

Carrying Qi Jian on his back and feeling the last rays of twilight on his face, Zhexiu silently thought, then turned to the southwest.

He could not see, but he wanted to look at those Demon Generals that wanted to kill him.

That distant hillside had been enveloped by the sunset and was, at this very moment, ablaze.

Liu Wan'er and Teng Xiaoming stood amongst the blazing field, looking back.

From a distance, the two pairs stared at each other.

"I'm going to start running,"

Zhexiu suddenly stated calmly and resolutely.

He could not see the path, and yet he was going to run?

Qi Jian was shocked, and his hands subconsciously tightened their grip on Zhexiu's shoulders.

Zhexiu said, "From time to time, you would report their position to me, and at the same time give me directions. Now.....first tell me, this cliff in front of me: how steep is it?"

Qi Jian's voice was very weak, and at this point, it began to shake even more. Because he was nervous, it took him a while before he replied, "It's about forty-three degrees.....can you really do it?"

"I'll definitely fall a few times, but I just need to get up and start running again."

After a pause, Zhexiu added, "The fall will hurt a lot, so don't cry."

Qi Jian gave a light grunt.

After a moment of silence, Zhexiu said, "Hold a bit tighter."

Qi Jian gave another grunt, then tightly wrapped his arms around Zhexiu's neck and brought his head close to the shoulders.

After all these preparations were complete, Zhexiu took a deep breath. The true essence in his body began to madly circulate around his body in order to suppress that poisonous Peacock Plume that was attempting to spread from his eyes to many other places. Then Zhexiu crouched his body.

As he moved, his two knees, through some method beyond human comprehension, began to bend strangely.

The front part of his boots burst open as sharp claws protruded from his dark wolf fur. As they thrust into the solid rock of the cliff, they gave a 'zeng' sound.

Simultaneously, countless hard and coarse hairs sprouted on the edge of his cheeks and his neck.

His transformation turned his eyes blood red. When mixed together with the green of the poison in the depths of his eyes, it produced a very strange hue.

It looked like a fresh lemon: sour to the extreme, able to stir up endless vigor.

"Afraid?" he asked.

Qi Jian did not answer. His hands tightened their grip even more and he drew even closer to Zhexiu's body.

Zhexiu was rather surprised, apparently. After a moment of silence, the corners of his lips perked up. He was probably smiling.

If Chen Changsheng were to see this, he would almost certainly be incredibly shocked, because he could not recall a single time he had seen Zhexiu smile.

It was a shame that Qi Jian's head was buried in Zhexiu's neck so that he could not see it.

Zhexiu said no more. Holding tightly onto Qi Jian's legs, he began rushing down the incomparably precipitous cliff face.

Sand and stone scattered; debris flew about in chaos.

Carrying Qi Jian, Zhexiu madly rushed. Every time his feet landed, they would dig deeply into the cliff, giving him an excellent grip.

The poison of the Peacock Plume had damaged his vision, but it did not hampered the rest of his strength.

After his demi-human transformation, the wolf youth could use his nearly perfect balance and speed to increase his running strength and instinctive adaptation to unimaginable levels, in accordance with his surroundings.

In only a few moments, he carried Qi Jian all the way to the bottom of the cliff.

Several miles away on the hillside, it was clear that the Demon General couple had not expected them to use this method, this direction, to break out of their entrapment. They paused for a while before once again beginning their pursuit.

With a rumble, the cliff trembled as two dragons made of dust followed them.

"South, at the Zhen Star, four miles."

Qi Jian withdrew his gaze, then attempted to make his weak voice as clear as possible. "Three hundred, two hundred forty, two hundred, one hundred seventy, stone steps, inclined at a forty-one degree angle, ready.....jump!"

Like a young male wolf, Zhexiu carried Qi Jian as he frantically made his way through the mountains. Turning into a gray shadow, he leaped up a dozen yards, directly jumping to the top of the stone steps.

Qi Jian felt that sudden shock of the landing and the pain of his abdomen. However, he held it down and made no sound. He weakly said, "Go straight for four hundred yards. Enter the forest?"

Zhexiu's heart and soul were engaged in running so he did not answer, only nodding his head.

Qi Jian rested his head on Zhexiu's shoulders once again, feeling the incessant shocks. As he saw the forest get closer and closer, his hands tightened their grip, and his mind also became more tense.

He was unable to see the path, carrying a heavily injured person, yet he still ran at his fastest speed.

Moreover, he was doing so in the mountains.

It was truly mad.

What Zhexiu was doing was mad.

With madness came an inevitable price to pay.

Even though he had already transformed, and even though Qi Jian was doing his best to calculate and giving him a constant stream of directions, he would still inevitably tumble—and these were serious tumbles.

However, just like he had said at the top of the cliff, every time he fell, he would get up straightway and continue running.

Because only by so madly rushing and throwing caution to the wind could they continue to live.

The first few times that they fell, Qi Jian would subconsciously close his eyes, but later on he no longer did. This was because every time they were about to fall, Zhexiu would always valiantly adjust his posture so that he suffered the brunt of the fall, doing as much as he could so that Qi Jian was not further injured.

He did it regardless of whether they fell on mud or sand, the soft water of the stream, or even the hard, sharp surface of the cliff.

Qi Jian did not close his eyes, not because Zhexiu's protection made him lose his fear of falling, but rather because he wanted to see the path ahead as clearly as possible, so that Zhexiu would hopefully fall less often.

Zhexiu's body was covered with wounds, flowing with blood.

He closed his eyes, lowered his head, and silently continued his mad rush.

Qi Jian tightly held on. His eyes had long ago turned red.

She wanted to cry.

However, he did not cry.

She was obedient.

So she did not cry.

An entire journey of chasing and fleeing.

Seeing the Sunset Valley, but unable to approach it. They could only keep moving forward.

In the end, there was no more path to walk.

Zhexiu, with Qi Jian on his back, had finally arrived at the perimeter of that plain, so he finally stopped running.

Liu Wan'er and Teng Xiaoming also stopped their chase.

This Demon General couple looked at the distant sun which was just about to set, then looked at the silhouette of that youth in front of that half-sun. Their eyes were filled with admiration.

Zhexiu's head was lowered as he continuously gasped for air.

Sweat and blood were all over his body and face and caused those dark hairs to tangle together, which made for an absolute mess.

Qi Jian rested against his shoulder, close to those very hard and very prickly hairs. They seemed to be very uncomfortable, but she felt that they were very soft.

"I'm sorry," he said apologetically. "My directions weren't very good."

Zhexiu expressionlessly replied, "It was me that didn't run fast enough."

The distant setting sun continued to hang at the edge of the horizon. For some reason, it had not been completely swallowed by the horizon.

In the sunset, the vast and boundless plain seemed to be suffused with a golden light, like the plaza of the Divine State.

This was the very center of the Garden of Zhou, its most enigmatic and most dangerous location—the legendary Plains of the Unsetting Sun.

Several hundred years ago, there were once many cultivators that attempted to enter this plain, yet of the people that entered, none of them had lived to return. They had only left behind

rumors.

It seemed very strange. If no one had ever been able to leave these plains, then how did those rumors get left behind?

"So where do we go next?" Qi Jian whispered.

Ahead of them were the plains; it was death.

Turning around was a battle, and also death.

It was just like Tang Thirty-Six and Chen Changsheng had said at the Ivy Festival: Qi Jian was a very delicate child.

However, in the end, he was a disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect. Moreover, he was the last disciple of Mount Li's Sect Master. At his waist was Mount Li's Relic Sword.

In his view, if he was going to die, then it should have been by turning around and engaging in one final battle.

Zhexiu did not turn around, nor did he ask for Qi Jian's opinion. Carrying him, he entered the plain with its grass that was about as high as a man.

"No human has come out of this plain alive," Qi Jian nervously said.

"I'm not a human, I'm a wolf."

Zhexiu continued, "The plains are my home. I don't believe there are plains that can imprison me."

Qi Jian said no more. Hugging Zhexiu, he somewhat rested his head against Zhexiu's shoulders comfortably.

The plains were filled with the same grass, so his directions were no longer needed.

Then walk wherever you want. No matter how far you walk, it is okay. No matter how long you walk, it is okay.

Even if it was the path to death, with someone to keep company, then he should still walk to the end and see.

The grass rustled as it rubbed against their clothes.

The distant sun still had not set.

It was just as stubborn as they were.

Chapter 266 - Those Who Will Not Walk Into The Dark Night

Teng Xiaoming and Liu Wan'er stood at the edge of the plain, staring at that sun which hung suspended over the distant horizon. Liu Wan'er said, "I heard that the sun that hangs over this plain never sets, which is why it's called the Plains of the Unsetting Sun... I just don't understand that if no one has ever been able to come out of the plain alive, then who was the one to see that the sun never sets?"

Teng Xiaoming heartily laughed, but he did not reply. He knew that she was not really asking for his opinion, but rather that she was somewhat unhappy.

"To actually let that wolf cub carry that person inside the plain.....even if they do die inside, what do we do? Are we going to have to wait? How can we confirm that they died?"

Liu Wan'er glanced at Teng Xiaoming. She thought to herself that with the husband's tyrannical cultivation, if they were outside the Garden of Zhou, what need would there be to chase them for such a long time? They could not even catch a poisoned wolf youth. Of course, if they were outside the garden, then Chen Changsheng and the rest would have been dead a long time ago. In order to enter the Garden of Zhou, they truly had to pay a disastrous price.

Teng Xiaoming knew what his wife was thinking. He gently caressed her hair and consolingly said, "I am willing to do this."

Who could have known that on this mission to infiltrate the Garden of Zhou, the Demon General couple with such a vicious reputation had personally requested to be sent? It was because... they had grown tired of the endless war with the humans and wanted to leave the army, to return to their old countryside. However, they knew very well that the Demon Lord would never accede to their request. In all of the demon realm, only the Military Advisor could help them fulfill their desire.

So they had sought out the Military Advisor, who had asked them to enter the Garden of Zhou to take care of this matter. For this reason, they had forcefully suppressed their cultivation, losing at least two hundred years' worth of life. However, if they could finish this task, then return to the countryside hand in hand, then it was just like Teng Xiaoming had said: they were willing.

They were Demon Generals at the middle level of Star Condensation. Even if they had forced their cultivation down to Ethereal Opening, they still possessed a battle prowess that far surpassed that of Ethereal Opening cultivators. For a person who had once climbed a mountain to slowly ramble amongst the hills once more, he could naturally walk as he pleased. Logically, amongst all the human cultivators within the Garden of Zhou, besides Xu Yourong, they could leisurely kill whoever they pleased.

However, they had not anticipated that Lady Nanke's two maids, in competing with each other for merit, would bring about so many troublesome affairs. They had even less anticipated that the human youth called Chen Changsheng would carry so many precious magical artifacts on his person. Even the strength and will that Zhexiu had expressed had surpassed their prediction, such

that he was able to successfully escape into the Plains of the Unsetting Sun.

Although entering that plain was assuredly a path that led to death, it was not them that had done the killing in the end.

This was the edge of the plain, so although that red sun seemed to never set, it was actually still setting very slowly. As time passed, two-thirds of it had passed below that seemingly endless plain, and the sky grew dark. Liu Wan'er said, "Wait a while before seeing the situation. Let's eat first."

Teng Xiaoming gave an obedient grunt, then put down his heavy carrying pole. Taking out firewood and bricks, he began to make a fire. Liu Wan'er removed this year's new rice from the carrying pole, as well as spring water taken from Jadespring Mountain. Then she began to rinse the rice. Only when the water began to flow out of the pot did she remember that, back at the lakeshore, Chen Changsheng had pierced a hole through this big pot.

Liu Wan'er was at a loss for words. That gentle and amiable face finally revealed a strand of irritation. "Chen Changsheng, that little fool, doesn't he know that damaging a pot and destroying a kitchen is this continent's most contemptible crime?"

Teng Xiaoming heartily laughed, then said, "We were going to kill him! How could he consider such things?"

Liu Wan'er groaned like a young girl, then said with displeasure, "I'll remember this enmity, and if those two maids can't kill him, I

won't be letting him off easy."

Teng Xiaoming consoled her, "When we go back home, we won't need to fight with humans anymore. We can sell off the broken pot for scrap and get a little money, so it's not that bad."

Saying these words, he took another pot from the basket and took the rice from her hands. Then he began to rinse the rice and prepare to cook it.

"What do you want to eat tonight?" Liu Wan'er asked.

Teng Xiaoming looked at the plain, hearing the cries that came from within. He hesitantly proposed, "Inside there are quite a few monsters. I could go inside and grab two? If I don't go too far, it shouldn't be a problem."

"To risk your life for a meal.....we're not birds, nor are we humans," Liu Wan'er said in a bad mood. Then she walked over to the basket and flipped through its contents for a while. Finally finding what she had been looking for, she brought it out and said, "Before we left, I brought along the left maid's left hand. We can cook it in the pot, then eat it with some of the hot sauce that was gifted to me?"

Previously at the lake shore, in the name of fairness, she had severed the hand of that dignified woman.

That hand was now being held in hers, its stump still traced with

blood.

Teng Xiaoming took the severed hand and used the spring water to wash it clean. Opening up the pot, he added a steaming tray, then also added a plate on top. With this done, he placed the hand inside.

"That pair of maids are too close to souls. The spiritual Qi in this hand is somewhat excessive—I'm afraid it won't digest very well." He thought it over, then said, "It's better to not use hot sauce. In a while I'll pair it with some apricots."

At home, he would always be the one to make the meal. Liu Wan'er was not very good at this, so she naturally had no opinion.

The water had not come to boil yet. They did not know whether those two youths in the plain were still alive or not.

Liu Wan'er and Teng Xiaoming sat shoulder-to-shoulder on a stone at the edge of the plain, watching as the sun set ever so slowly.

"We haven't done this for a long time."

"Mm."

"Seventy-three years ago, you were still just a lowly soldier. Where'd you find the courage to ask me out to see the setting sun?"

"Mm.....I lost a bet with a colleague."

Liu Wan'er glared at him. "So you finally admit it."

Teng Xiaoming thought it over, then said, "I've already admitted it four-hundred-and-forty-one times."

Liu Wan'er paid him no mind. Snuggling closer to his shoulder and looking at the distant sun, she said contentedly, "Truly beautiful."

Teng Xiaoming pondered how to respond, and decided that this was a time to lie, so he said, "Mm."

Liu Wan'er face showed a yearning expression. "When we go back home, we can sit like this every day and look at the sunset."

Teng Xiaoming once again pondered how to respond, and decided that he could no longer continue to lie, even if it would be hard for him in the future. He said honestly, "We'd get tired of it."

Liu Wan'er arched her brow and said, "If you see me for too long, you'll also get tired of it."

Teng Xiaoming did not think about it, and he did not lie. He said sincerely, "I won't."

For an even more beautiful person, if one looked at her beauty all the time, then there would inevitably be a day when one grew tired of it.

Chen Changsheng did not have this sort of life experience, but he had a lot to say about the sun, because it was something that he could never be tired of. Every day he would wake up at five o'clock, when the sky was still dark. After washing his face and rinsing his mouth, he would stand under the plum tree, or next to the temple, or by the lake, or on top of the great banyan, and see the sunrise as usual. This was what made him the happiest.

At night, he would usually be asleep, and so he was very unfamiliar with the dark night. Moreover, this was why he did not like the dark night.

Whether it was a good night or a cold night, he did not like night at all. Whether it gently walked or angrily advanced, he wanted no part of it.

He was afraid of death, because he did not want to die.

He was not afraid of death, because he had thought of death many times.

So before the moment of death, he would always burst forth with an unimaginable strength.

The Black Dragon had seen it.

The Divine Empress had seen it.

Gou Hanshi had seen it.

Now, it was time for his enemies to see that strength.

Liang Xiaoxiao's shoulder had a new sword wound, which was currently dripping blood.

The bodies of those two demon beauties were covered with sword marks. The smiles had long ago disappeared from their faces, leaving behind a grave and serious expression.

Chen Changsheng's left hand grasped the umbrella, his right hand the dagger. His face was pale, devoid of blood. His true essence had been almost completely used up.

However, his expression was as serious as ever.

From the beginning to the end, he had always been this serious.

This time, he would have to get even more serious to live—to live so that death could see.

Chapter 267 - Wings Of Light

Chen Changsheng's expression was serious and intent, but it was not confident, because right now his posture was rather strange.

If he were to use his umbrella as a shield and move forward with his dagger, then it would be like a brave warrior ascending onto the battlefield. However, right now, the umbrella was not being wielded in his hand, rather being dragged along the sand. He held his dagger upside-down at his wrist, while his knees were slightly bent. His body was leaned forward, as if he was ready at any time to flee. He seemed just like a little thief, a little thief ready to fight for his life.

Because he was almost at his breaking point, his physical strength had been used up to the extent that he could no longer hold up the Yellow Paper Umbrella for extended periods of time. He could only let it drag on the ground, only bringing it up to block when the attack was just about to arrive. The incredibly sharp dagger was in a similar situation. The remnants of his true essence were not enough for him to use those extremely formidable sword styles. Even such simple actions such as slashing and thrusting were very difficult for him to do.

The dagger being held upside down at his wrist meant that the sword-play he used was naturally not very open and sweeping. He could only use very fine movements. The two demon women had to have several close calls before they realized that he was actually using the Holy Maiden Peak's Icebreaking Sword. They could not help but be exceptionally shocked—this method had always been practiced by the disciples of the Holy Maiden Peak, so where did he learn it?

Whether it was the demon beauty with not a thread of clothes or that dignified woman wearing Qi Jian's robe, they each had very solemn expressions. The gazes that they focused on Chen Changsheng were also abnormally grave. It rather puzzled them, even giving them a faint sense of admiration, that a human youth could actually hold on for such a long time in this situation.

However, if the battle persisted, victory would eventually belong to the Spirit race.

Behind them were two large wings made of light, which quickly began to vibrate faster. There was only a whoosh on the beach, and then the demons disappeared. In the next moment, they appeared behind Chen Changsheng, their hands glowing with a ghastly green light as they came piercing at him.

With such terrifying speed, like bolts of lightning, these sly demons were like smoke. Their abilities far surpassed the imagination of the vast majority of humans. This was what Chen Changsheng had resisted for such a long time.

How did he do it? In the instant that those two wings appeared behind him, he moved. His true essence flowed through his damaged meridians and his feet moved seemingly very naturally, but in fact very precisely, to the left. His figure suddenly disappeared, and reappeared several zhang away.

Those two wings swiftly moved once more, bringing those two women to Chen Changsheng's back, and blocking him from the

lake.

Chen Changsheng raised up the umbrella to block. With only a hiss, both sides launched a flurry of rapid blows against each other, then split apart.

The bodies of the two women were covered with sword slashes once again, which gradually disappeared, just like the numerous cracks Chen Changsheng had made on the wings at their backs.

The demon beauty stared at Chen Changsheng. Her face pale. "So it really was the Yeshe Step."

Previously they had been shocked by Chen Changsheng's abnormal movements. After several probing attacks, they finally confirmed what it was.

They were Nanke's maids and also her two wings. Moreover, they had extraordinary bodies, so they possessed a terrifying innate speed. Just in terms of leaping and rushing over short distances, they could truly be described as bolts of lightning. Ethereal Opening cultivators had no chance; even amongst true Star Condensation experts, there were very few people that could keep up with their speed.

Chen Changsheng had bathed in the true blood of the Black Dragon, allowing his strength and speed to reach the peak of Ethereal Opening, but even he was incapable of keeping up with their speed. However... he knew the Yeshe Step.

Yes, although his Yeshi Step was not perfect, since he only practiced a simplified version of his own making, it was enough to help him in those most dangerous moments when he needed to avoid their lightning-quick attacks.

This was the most important reason he had been able to live up to now.

Liang Xiaoxiao grasped his sword and stood in the forest. As he viewed this scene and heard that demon woman speak, his expression subtly changed.

As for those two women that had competed with Chen Changsheng in terms of speed and reactions many times, their expressions grew even more grave.

The reason why the Demon race's plan in the Garden of Zhou had yet to succeed was all because Chen Changsheng had exceeded their expectations: whether it be his many powerful magical artifacts or his body and sword techniques, or even his tenacious and unyielding will. However, what really made them nervous was that on the various details around Chen Changsheng, including his surpassingly sharp dagger, his extremely firm umbrella, or the precious Thousand Mile Button, and even his mastery of the Yeshi Step; the Military Advisor most definitely knew all about these. So why had the Military Advisor not given them any sort of warning before they had entered the Garden of Zhou?

The Military Advisor had not even brought it up.

It could not be that these were Chen Changsheng's secrets that not even the Military Advisor knew about. The Military Advisor was omniscient; this was a conviction that all demons cleaved to.....then what was the Military Advisor aiming to do? Could it be that in this plot, there were still details that they were not aware of? Did it involve their master? They could not resolve this problem, so they were uneasy. In reality, their master, and even the great Demon Lord himself, were mystified about the true motives of the enigmatic Black Robe.

They suddenly realized that the wind blowing off the lake had become much colder. This brought their attention to the fact that the sun had almost set behind the mountains.

However, they had not received new orders from the Military Advisor, which meant that they had to extinguish the four flames floating in the life sea—to kill off those four people.

Chen Changsheng suddenly felt that the trees by the lakeshore were beginning to move.

Liang Xiaoxiao, his expression grave and his sword at his chest, unhesitatingly used the Mount Li Sword Sect's most powerful sword technique.

He had already crossed swords with Chen Changsheng several times. Regardless of how powerful his sword style, or how dense his sword energy, he had been unable to pierce through his opponent's Yeshe Step. Twice now Nanke's two maids had used their lightning-fast speed to entangle Chen Changsheng, at which point Liang Xiaoxiao looked for an opportune time to attack. Yet,

both times, Chen Changsheng had easily broken through his sword moves.

Liang Xiaoxiao was unable to get the better of Chen Changsheng. He felt that no matter what move he used, it was as if this youth had already guessed it beforehand. Moreover, his opponent had always been able to execute the move which was most adapted to hurting him.

This sort of feeling was extremely uncomfortable, extremely disastrous.

This time was no exception. The dagger pressed up against Chen Changsheng's wrist was thrust towards that sky filled with sword wind. It easily found the most critical point of his sword energy and fell upon it. With a snap, this most simple and yet most effective action had stopped the sword move. Afterwards, the slightly gloomy forest by the lake was lit up by a sword glow. Liang Xiaoxiao was compelled to move backwards in order to avoid the attack.

All of the secrets of the Mount Li Sword Style now rested in the Orthodox Academy.

If Liang Xiaoxiao had been even more learned in the traditional Mount Li Sword Style, if he was even more skilled, how could he have gotten the better of Chen Changsheng?

His magical artifacts were many, and fortuitously so, but what he had the most of was still knowledge. Memorizing the entire Daoist

Canon was one thing, but of the books on cultivation in the Orthodox Academy's library, the vast majority of them had become nutrients for his sea of consciousness within the very short span of one year. Countless sword arts had been committed to his mind. Besides Gou Hanshi and Guan Feibai, amongst this generation of young cultivators, who would dare say that they knew more sword styles than him?

If he were facing off some other demon experts, then even if it was one versus three, Chen Changsheng—with all of his treasures and methods to protect his body—could perhaps really have killed his way out, and maybe even obtained victory. Just like before..... He had broken through Liang Xiaoxiao's Mount Li Sword Style, then pretended to retreat into the woods. In reality, he gathered up the remnants of his true essence and burned it all up, pouring all his power into that dagger. With a flip of his wrist, it turned into a biting cold awl and stabbed at a tree branch in the air.

There was a sharp screech.

Those two women had just appeared in that place, their wings flapping.

With a whirlwind of blood, a deep sword slash appeared on their necks. If it were even deeper, one would even be able to see the bone.

The setting sun illuminated the forest by the lakeside. The wind brushed against the surface of the lake, and the waves gently splashed.

One hand held a dagger, the other an umbrella. Chen Changsheng's chest heaved up and down, and his gasps for breath slowly returned to normal.

In his eyes was a tinge of regret.

His move, although it had heavily injured those two woman, had not cut through the throat, so it was meaningless.

They could even regenerate severed hands, so what meaning was there to wounds on the body?

Why did that dignified woman have no horns? How was her blood red? How was it that when the naked demon beauty had used her charming arts, the demon horns on her head had disappeared of their own accord? All of it was because they were not humans, nor were they demons.

They were shamans. To be more precise, they were shaman spirits. Their bodies rested on the line between the real and the spiritual.

When they stood together, it was obvious that their facial features and appearance were completely different, and yet they gave the feeling that they were twins. It was because they had always been twins—they were a pair of wings.

Just like those two wings of light on their backs.

Those wings of light and their almost spiritual bodies allowed them to possess an unimaginable speed. Even if Chen Changsheng used the Yeshi Step, he still would not have been able to escape.

If there was only one wing, then it would have never been impossible to take flight. Just like how if those two were separated, they were just ordinary upper level Ethereal Opening experts. This was why in the center of the lake and the lakeshore, Chen Changsheng and the others had been able to severely injure them. If they were together, they could directly fly up into the blue sky, increasing their battle strength by more than ten times.

The most powerful Liu Wan'er and Teng Xiaoming, the Demon General couple, had taken their leave to pursue Zhexiu and Qi Jian mainly because Qi Jian was their primary target, but there was also another reason. This was because that husband and wife could tell that due to some problem with his true essence or cultivation method, Chen Changsheng lacked the strength to instantly kill. So the only thing that lay in store for him was death.

Those two wings made of congealed light slowly flapped behind those two women. It was very beautiful.

In Chen Changsheng's eyes, those wings of light were just as terrifying. His grip tightened on his dagger as he attempted to find a means of escaping this encirclement, but he could not find one.

Those two women lowered their heads to look at the wounds on their necks, but they could not see it. Then they looked into each

other's eyes, and then looked at Chen Changsheng's neck. All their actions were perfectly synchronized.

Monstrous green blood and gaudy red blood flowed incessantly from those two sword wounds.

They clearly felt the pain, and they had seen the shadow of death. They were truly angry, yet their expressions grew increasingly calm and solemn.

Those two wings suddenly began to beat much faster.

A massive wind rose up on the lakeshore.

In the twilight, there appeared one more magnificent streak of light.

Chapter 268 - Falling Into The Setting Sun's Reflection

The final moment had come, so it was meaningless for him to hold back any hidden cards. Without hesitation, Chen Changsheng entered self-introspection, then ignited the last remnants of the snowy plain.

Yet for some reason, he did not let his spiritual sense touch the water of the lake that surrounded his Ethereal Palace.

The snowy plain burst into a fiery conflagration, replenishing his true essence.

He used the Yeshi Step.

His figure abruptly vanished from the front of the forest, suddenly appearing in a distant place. Then it disappeared, and reappeared, appearing and disappearing, like a spirit or smoke.

However, the stream of light was truly too fast. No matter where he appeared, in the very next moment he would be facing that stream of light.

The sound of a sword breaking through the air continuously sounded out. The wind on the lake shore and the sound of the waves were all sliced into countless pieces.

On occasion, blood would spurt forth into the air like a flower. Yet when the flower of blood landed on the ground, the people battling had already appeared dozens of zhang away.

Those flowers of blood were sometimes green and sometimes red.

After Chen Changsheng's body had been bathed in dragon blood, it was incomparably strong as expected. In the battle, his body had not yet suffered a single wound. However, although he had the Yellow Paper Umbrella to protect him, he had been struck several times by those women's attacks, imbued with the highly toxic Peacock Plume. The sinister and awe-inspiring pressure of those attacks had penetrated past his skin, attacking his internal organs. This had caused many internal wounds, and there were even two occasions in which he almost spit out blood, only to forcefully choke it back down.

However now, he had attempted a dangerous act. By placing all his true essence into his dagger, a gap had emerged in the protective field of the umbrella. After a sequence of attacks, he could no longer hold it down, and a fine trickle of blood appeared at the corner of his lips.

He already did not have the strength to hold the umbrella, so the Yellow Paper Umbrella had lost its use. He did not want to leave such a precious magical artifact behind for his enemies, so with a thought, a series of metallic clashes and screeches ensued. In a flash, the Yellow Paper Umbrella had withdrawn, returning its former shape of a scale-covered metal ball, after which it disappeared into his palm.

He no longer grasped his dagger reversed over his wrist. Instead he held it very casually, making it seem like he was a young man carrying around a wine bottle as he returned home to his parents.

The sun continued to sink, and the temperature continued to drop. The last twilight of the sun in the direction of the distant plain let the lake give off its last bit of warmth. In the form of wind, it brushed against his face, urging him on.

He took a handkerchief from his sleeve to wipe clean that trickle of blood, then put it away. The handkerchief also disappeared to some place.

Yet in just this brief moment of time, the wind had still managed to graze against that blood, bringing with it some of its aroma.

It was not the smell of blood, but some other extremely bizarre scent.

Liang Xiaoxiao stood in front of the forest, his sword brought up in defense, guarding against any attempt by Chen Changsheng to use the Yeshi Step to enter the forest. The distance between the two was somewhat large.

The two women were shaman souls, so their five senses were extremely sharp. In addition, they were very close in front of Chen Changsheng, so they were able to smell that aroma.

It truly did not smell of blood, nor was it sweet, much less the smell of iron in the late winter. Instead it was a sort of... fragrance.

The fragrance was very light, like an orchid in the deep valley, and yet it was extremely fragrant, as if the orchid was right in front of them.

The fragrance was like the scent of some sparkling pure fruit as it slowly ripened. It was also like the mountain wind passing over numberless valleys of pine trees, bringing along a night's worth of their clear and refreshing scent. And it was also like the salty smell that arose when the morning sun shone upon the stones on the beach. This fragrance was incomparably complex, and yet it was incomparably pure. It was rich to the extreme, and yet also clean to the extreme.

On that night so many years ago, the scent had caused all those mystical beings in the great fog behind Xining village to grow restless.

One year ago, the scent had caused that little girl separated by a wall from the Orthodox Academy to go over the wall and find its source.

Besides the night on which he fixed his Fated Star, this sort of aroma had not appeared around Chen Changsheng's body for a long time, even when he bled during the Grand Examination or when his body had been a mangled mess in the underground space. However, after that night of viewing the monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books, that scent had once appeared in his blood.

The closer one was to nature, the more spiritual the being, the more they could smell that aroma. They were also less capable of resisting and would want to get closer.

Possessing the blood of the White Emperor, even Luoluo was drawn to it, so how could these two women with spiritual bodies possibly be able to resist?

It only took an instant for them to be intoxicated, to be struck dumb. It was as if they returned to that sea of flowers from the time that they first were born into this world.

The wings of light behind them gradually began to slow down. They seemed soft and pure, possessing not even a bit of their former strength. They seemed rather to be fanning the women.

Chen Changsheng did not understand what was happening, but he knew that this was his last opportunity to escape.

Liang Xiaoxiao could not smell that scent, so he remained very clear-headed. His guard had always been up, so he realized very quickly that there was something peculiar going on by the lake shore. His expression suddenly turned cold, and he sent his cold sword flying from his hand. He used the Mount Li Sword Style's most awe-inspiring and most defensive three moves of the Iron Cliff consecutively. Between the lake and Chen Changsheng, it formed a protective screen that was difficult to overcome.

He hoped that it would be able to block Chen Changsheng long

enough that those two women could return to normal.

He firmly believed that no matter how much Chen Changsheng knew about the Mount Li Sword Style, or how unpredictable the Yeshi Step was, it would be impossible for Chen Changsheng to pierce the three moves of the Iron Cliff in such a short time.

However, Chen Changsheng did not use the Yeshi Step.

On the lake shore, the sword wind kicked up as the sword energy gathered.

Three Forms of Wenshui, Hanging Sunset!

He reversed the technique, using the sword as the person, the person as the sword, thus directly tossing himself into the air.

At this moment, the splendid red of the setting sun was hanging in the western sky.

On the already somewhat gloomy lake shore, there was yet another setting sun.

Chen Changsheng rose through the air, passing over Liang Xiaoxiao's sword energy and flying high into the sky, before finally landing in the lake.

He landed in the lake on that setting sun's reflection.

Water splashed in every direction.

Those two women were roused from their stupor, their eyes still containing traces of perplexity, as they had no idea what had happened in those moments. In the next moment, their perplexity was all converted into anger.

It would seem that they were finally going to kill that unreasonable youth. How could they let him escape?!

The wings of light began to beat faster, and an ear-splitting hum arose on the lake shore.

A stream of light shot towards the center of lake, then suddenly turned in the air and shot into the lake.

The sky had grown dark, and the reflection of the setting sun on the lake could not illuminate much. The lake water, clear and transparent in the day, had already become somewhat gloomy. The depths of the lake were especially dark, making it extremely difficult to see anything, as if the water were ink. In this darkness, that distant dot of light seemed increasingly striking.

Chen Changsheng kicked his legs, doing his best to swim towards the light. He remembered very clearly that it was the tunnel through which he and Zhexiu had come over.

Yet he had not even swum a few dozen zhang before his body

began to feel an immense pressure.

He did not need to turn around to know that it was those two women chasing after him.

The wings of light moved quickly through the watery depths, like two untiring oars, bringing along those two women. They made a clear line of water as they shot towards him.

The lake was thrown into a great upheaval, as if it was boiling.

Chen Changsheng knew that he would not make it to that light in time. In the water, he turned around and grasped his dagger once more. His two legs were still kicking swiftly, so that he maintained his swimming posture while preparing for the arrival of his enemies.

The faint ray of light dispersed in the water. The two women, one completely naked and the other tightly wrapped in a sword robe, seemed like two white fish. The wings of light behind them illuminated their surroundings, suffusing the dark blue with light. It was incredibly beautiful, such that even at this moment, Chen Changsheng inwardly exclaimed his admiration.

The line of water moved forward without stopping, arriving very quickly before him.

Chen Changsheng stabbed his dagger at them, but that dignified woman was actually truly angry, so she unexpectedly made no

move to evade, letting him stab that dagger into her bulging chest. Simultaneously she wrapped her arms around his hand, locking it in place. At the same time, the other woman wrapped around. She truly wrapped around him, her two hands grabbing his left arm tightly while her two legs wrapped around his waist.

Those two wings slowly closed, like a shell.

Chen Changsheng was sealed within those two wings of light, pressed up tightly against those two women.

If this were not a life and death struggle, then the word 'snuggle' would perhaps be an even better description of the scene.

They were all packed tight.

They could see each other's faces, see how their appearances changed in the water.

That dignified woman had an indifferent expression.

In that charming woman eyes, there was both laughter and apology.

The water grew darker and darker, and the lake bottom even more so, like the abyss, like the night.

The strangest and most undesired night.

Only the wings of light remained glowing.

In the icy water, falling towards the deathly night, Chen Changsheng's eyes began to grow dim.

He knew that there was no other option now but to take that risk, or else if he waited for his mind to dim as well, then he would not even have time for regret.

Right now, he felt some regret. He should not have let the Black Dragon leave. Although it would not have been of any help in the battle, it definitely would have been of some use right now in the lake.

Just at this moment, he suddenly felt a strand of sword intent.

The sword intent was very elusive, yet very distinct.

He remembered that before he had come over to this side, when he was standing by the pool, he had also felt a strand of sword intent.

Was this the same sword intent?

The sword intent of the triple-layered Iron Cliff on the lake shore gradually faded away.

Gazing at the once again calm surface of the lake, Liang Xiaoxiao was silent for a very long time.

From his entrance into the Mount Li Sword Sect up to now, his life could without a doubt be considered extremely successful.

However, his most successful moment, in his opinion, was not too long ago, when his sword ran through Qi Jian's abdomen.

Of course, that was also his most difficult moment.

What was his greatest failure?

He had originally thought it was the time when he climbed Mount Li and met Eldest Brother.

Because from that moment on, he knew that he would never be able to catch up to Eldest Brother.

But now, he no longer thought that way.

The greatest moment of failure in his life, perhaps, was every moment that he met Chen Changsheng.

It was a good thing that he was dead now.

Liang Xiaoxiao returned his sword to his sheath and walked into

the forest. He silently thought to himself that as long as he killed off everyone on this side of the lake, then the trip to the Garden of Zhou would have been successful.

The figure in the mountains had taken its leave long ago. It was very fast, fleeing for its life not just in name, but also in reality. Only that the world on this side of the lake was very small compared to the vastness of the Garden of Zhou, so where could he flee to?

It did not take much time before he found the person.

Zhuang Huanyu had never been known as being handsome or confident. In the capital, most of his reputation came from his talent in cultivation. Amongst the students of the Six Ivies, he had always been considered an extremely plain person. However, he still had his pride as a student of the Heavenly Dao Academy. Although his clothes were simple, they were very clean, and there was no place that he would be lacking in manners.

The Zhuang Huanyu of the present cut a sorry figure. His clothes were torn all over from the scratches of tree branches. His face was covered with bits of grass, and he had even lost one of his shoes in his flight.

Moreover, he was very lacking in manners.

Chapter 269 - Past And Present Fate (Part One)

Zhuang Huanyu saw the Cloud-piercing Arrow and knew what it was, so he rushed over to the lake shore, where he saw the Demon race's long-plotted assassination.

Yet from beginning to end, he had never appeared, never taking action.

In the beginning, he was truly too late to assist. However, when Liang Xiaoxiao used his sword to heavily wound Zhexiu and then Qi Jian.....he did not dare to take action.

However, at that time, he still had a little courage, because that most powerful Demon General couple had left.

It was for this reason that Chen Changsheng was able to persist for so long, because he wanted to inspire some courage in him. Liang Xiaoxiao had not put his all into the battle because he was wary of him.

From a certain point of view, he had some use.

The problem was that he had never been able to gather enough courage to rush towards the lake shore, and when Chen Changsheng could hold on no longer, all his courage also vanished into the air in that instant.

He turned and left, and began to flee.

The act truly marked him as very lacking in manners.

"In the Mausoleum of Books, I managed to view up to the third monolith—I've already broken into the next realm!"

Zhuang Huanyu's right hand held the sword of the Heavenly Dao Academy, while his left hand held a magical artifact. Looking at Liang Xiaoxiao blocking his way, he said with his pale face, "I'm also Ethereal Opening, I'm not afraid of you!"

He had also been one of the young geniuses on the Proclamation of Azure Sky. Although he was not ranked above Liang Xiaoxiao, in the eyes of the common folk, he was equally famous as the Divine State's Seven Laws.

However, the current him, with his head and face covered in dirt and his mind in chaos, did not have the slightest bearing of a young genius.

Liang Xiaoxiao said, "You can strike."

Even if the world really did have prodigal sons that came home and were worth more than gold, there was still no person that could turn around so quickly.

Even if there really were cases of showing bravery after regaining a sense of shame, there were very few cases in which a person

would be able to clearly see their shame in such a short time, then regain their courage.

The sword in Zhuang Huanyu's hand trembled, just like his voice. He was almost about to drop the sword, so how was he going to stab with it?

"You know who my father is." Forgetting himself, Zhuang Huanyu yelled, "If you dare kill me, then your death is also assured!"

Saying these words, only then did he realize that the person in front of him had dared to defect to the demons, and even dared to kill the last disciple of Mount Li's Sect Master. So how could he scare him off?

As he thought of this, he was suddenly seized by an indescribable sense of anger.

Liang Xiaoxiao was expressionless. In his mind, he silently thought, then, does anybody know who my father is?

Zhuang Huanyu saw that his words had not brought about any sort of response, which made him even more uneasy. His voice shaking, he said, "If you really want to force me, we'll go down together in the worst case."

With these words, he did not lift up his sword, but instead raised the magical artifact in his left hand.

Liang Xiaoxiao's gaze rested on that magical artifact, and his expression suddenly shifted. He realized that this was one of the Heavenly Dao Academy's seven magical artifacts, the Jadestone.

He was quite astonished at this realization.

Since this person was actually carrying around such a powerful magical artifact, if he and Chen Changsheng really had worked together, then perhaps it would have brought about an unthinkable change.

"I didn't realize that Vice Principal Zhuang doted so heavily on his son. He actually flouted the regulations of the academy and secretly gave you such a precious treasure."

He looked at Zhuang Huanyu and coldly said, "If this matter were to come out, what would be the consequences for you?"

Zhuang Huanyu calmed down a bit and said, "So what? Is it more wretched than death?"

Liang Xiaoxiao said, "The clue on the Sword Pool—it seems that Vice Principal Zhuang found it. He didn't tell Mao Qiuyu, nor did he report it to the Li Palace. He only secretly told you. But what sort of crime is that? Most importantly, back there you didn't go help Chen Changsheng—what sort of crime is that? I think that even if you do leave the Garden of Zhou, I'm afraid your ending really might be more wretched than death."

Zhuang Huanyu's face grew even paler. He simply had no idea how to respond. Liang Xiaoxiao turned back to the already completely calm surface of the lake, observing it in silence for a few moments, before suddenly saying, "Chen Changsheng is already dead. Zhexiu and Qi Jian are also most definitely going to die. The only person left who knows about this matter is you."

Zhuang Huanyu could faintly understand his meaning, and yet he did not believe it. Moreover.....the price demanded was far beyond what he could stomach.

"You want me to be like you?" Two patches of red appeared on his face, perhaps due to anger, or some other reason, like shame.

Liang Xiaoxiao calmly gazed at him and said, "Besides this, what other reason do I have to let you go?"

Zhuang Huanyu's breathing grew rough and heavy. The reason was still unknown: anger, shame, or nerves? After a long time, he asked in bewildered fashion, "This... just why did you do this?"

This was a question directed at himself, and also at Liang Xiaoxiao. Qi Jian had asked it, Chen Changsheng had asked it, but Liang Xiaoxiao had never given an answer. This time was no exception. Liang Xiaoxiao looked at the last embers of the sunset on the calm surface of the lake and thought to himself, how could the world have so many whys?

The border of the Garden of Zhou consisted of an unbroken wall

of uneven mountains. Then there were hills and three imposing mountain ranges that led towards the center district, that vast and boundless plain. Of these three mountain ranges, Sunset Valley was the longest and the tallest. Its cliffs were extremely steep and smooth like they had been cut by a knife. On this mountain ridge that was several thousand zhang tall, there was only one extremely steep path.

That young lady dressed in white was walking along this high and steep mountain path. On both sides of her was the sky, so it seemed like she was walking in the air, her white clothes a slowly moving cloud.

If she were to continue walking forward, then there would eventually be a point where she arrived at Sunset Valley's most forward point. Over there, she would be able to see the sun setting over that plain, as well as the vast majority of the Garden of Zhou. But today, she would first encounter that zither-playing old man and that girl with the indifferent expression.

She did not know that the old man and young girl were waiting for her, so she continued her journey towards that setting sun.

The Black Dragon flew at an even higher altitude, so it could see both the girl walking on the mountain path as well as the girl that was waiting at the end of that path. Its way of doing things had somewhat departed from Chen Changsheng's initial plan, but it was too late to change it now. It decided that it had to find a way to warn that white-clothed young lady. Yet just as it had resolved to do so, the summit of Sunset Valley enveloped in the twilight suddenly resounded with the sound of a zither. This sound was

exceptionally clear and extremely distant, but in an instant it had been transferred over many miles.

The white-clothed young lady halted her footsteps. She slightly inclined her head, as if she was listening closely. On her elegant yet not particularly beautiful cheeks appeared a hint of laughter. She was not on her guard, but rather seemed to be enjoying it.

The sound of the zither did not stop. The notes rushed out like water, connecting together into a tune. It was a very cheerful piece of music, as if it were welcoming guests from afar, and also like a hunter celebrating over the night's harvest.

If the hunter's harvest was extremely plentiful, the people would build a big bonfire in the field and suspend the food over the fire to roast until the oil flowed, allowing the fragrance to cause those fierce beasts in the night to salivate.

The Black Dragon subconsciously looked at that vast plain. She knew very well that concealed in those grasses that were about as high as a man were many fierce beasts. Then she saw that the edge of the plain was on fire. That was the last vestige of light and warmth from the setting sun, and it seemed just like a bonfire.

Although time passed by ever so slowly, the critical point approached. Then, as sudden as it often was with this sort of thing, without any sort of mental preparation, the sun had silently sunken below the horizon. The night had finally come.

No sun did not mean that there was no light, only that both the

sky and the earth were much darker than usual. The vast plain, which even the Black Dragon could not see the end of, became a dark and gloomy ocean. Seeing this oceanic plain, the Black Dragon gave off a light sigh. The sigh was one of contentment and reminiscence, because this scene reminded her of her home. The gloom did not necessarily mean cold. Although it was a Black Frost Dragon, it also loved the warmth. In the deep blue—almost black—waters of its home, the waters were warm, heated by the blazing sun to be almost like bathing water. The beaches of those islands were like bits of silver.....

The Divine Empress had peeled her spiritual soul away from the body and poured it into the jade ruyi so that she could follow Chen Changsheng on this journey to the Garden of Zhou, and report on his situation at any time. In some manners of speaking, she was still a prisoner. Her jail was no longer that underground space beneath the Imperial Palace, but a small ruyi. The restrictions on her strength were no longer those iron chains, but the shadow of death. She still had to confront the depression on her mind, the pressure brought about by being a traitor. No matter how she looked at this, the trip was not a very good mission. Yet when she accompanied Chen Changsheng and left the capital, she realized that it was actually a very good thing. It was the first time in several hundred years that she had left that cold and lonely underground world. She saw countless sights that had already become strange to her. She saw so many humans and demi-humans that were once food to her. All this made her feel incomparably happy, such that she even forgot about many things. Only now did she finally think about her home.

Are all unreachable places called distant lands? For the Dragon race, there was no place on this world that they could not go. Is the place you could not go back to called home? Yes, could she still go

home?

She looked at the plain which was as dark as the ocean, thinking about the deep sea that was like a plain, far to the south. She thought of home, thought of her father, thought of many things, and then she began to grieve.

It was different from the legends. Dragons did not live up in high mountains and lofty mountain ranges, in strange caves concealed by the clouds. As the most powerful and most intelligent of all living beings, how could they enjoy living in such a gloomy and cold environment? Dragons loved palm trees, silver beaches, jade oceans, the sun and the wind, and palaces.

On this point, when all life had evolved to its highest point, there was not much difference. It was unknown whether the Demon race's constant encroachments on the south to exterminate the Human race were also related to this.

The dragons lived far off in the southern seas. Over there, the water was very warm.

That was also the Black Dragon's home.

The Golden Dragons' blood was most noble, their existence was most powerful, and they led the entire Dragon Race. However, the Black Frost Dragons were even prouder and colder. They loved to leave the crowd and find their own places to live. They never took pleasure in conversing with their fellows. To put it simply, they were lofty and cold to the extreme.

Countless years ago, the leaders of the Dragon race, the Golden Dragons, had disappeared from the continent for some reason. The Black Frost Dragons had naturally arisen as the most suited candidates for next leaders of the Dragon race.

In those days, as long as her father nodded his head, he could have become chief of all dragons. However, her father was unwilling, not wanting all the trouble. He set off on his own from the southern sea, going to the continent.

The zither continued to play, like a summoning, like a recollection, like the wind that blew over the snowy plains all those years ago.

The Black Dragon looked at the dark plain, at the Sunset Valley, then was suddenly overcome by grief. Her dragon eyes were filled with tears, causing a small rain to fall from the sky of the Garden of Zhou.

Right now, she was only a strand of her spiritual soul. In terms of spirit, she was far weaker than her original body. She had actually been stirred up by the sound of that zither, moreover... she did not resist it.

Because the zither had caused her think of the past, caused her see her father after he had left home.

Her father had been the strongest Black Frost Dragon of the past one thousand years. He was of a hue even darker than the night.

His breath was a sword of ice and snow that reached far away. His strength was unimaginable.

Her father had met a human.

The human carried a great blade that seemed able to pierce the heavens.

No matter how strong her father was, he still would not have been able to resist that blade.

It seemed that all things placed in front of the edge of that blade could only be severed into two.

Not to mention that the great battle had taken place in the Garden of Zhou.

The human was the master of the Garden of Zhou.

The blade really had chopped at the sky, and on the azure sky appeared a distinct slash.

With time, the slash slowly faded away, but the plain under it had taken on a very different appearance.

The sky had been severed, and the black that was even darker than the night had also been severed into two.

Her father had fallen from the sky, and his enormous body had become a mountain range.

In the setting sun, that mountain range seemed almost ablaze. At the very front of the mountain range was the loftiest peak. That was the dragon's head. The plain also burned, and those clouds of red were the dragon's blood.

The Black Dragon finally understood those events of the past; why her father had never returned from his journey.

Her eyes were full of tears, then they suddenly went cold, turning into chunks of ice.

Humans are humans, as expected.

Shameless humans, cold-blooded humans.

She looked at that white-clothed young lady making her way up that solitary mountain path and indifferently thought, go die then.

Both sides of the mountain path were precipitous cliffs, the bare rock seemingly very smooth. Even more frightening was that person who, all those years ago, created these stone steps upon which only one person could walk.

The wind up here was much fiercer than the wind below, and also much colder. Down below, because the mountains were too high, were the clouds. However, because of the wind, they could

not form any shapes, and were blown into thin strands.

Hearing the masterful and subtle sound of the zither, the white-clothed young lady began to think about rather worldly things, like the small village's cotton candy, or the little balls of white hanging from the willow tree under the bridge not far from home. Or that time when she first entered the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, when she was not used to the thick bedding and randomly kicked out with her legs, which ended up beating the bedding to bits, and leaving the dorm full of cotton filling.

When she thought of these things, she smiled. The corners of her lips perked up, causing her normal and elegant face to suddenly brighten, causing even the clear and solitary mountain path to seemingly warm up a few degrees.

Accompanied by the zither, she continued forward.

Before the peak of the cliff, there was actually a tree.

She walked over to the tree, planning to take a rest.

Because of its environment, this tree did not have a single leaf left, only smooth branches. It matched very well with the cliffs on both sides, almost melting into the mountain, so it was no wonder she had not seen it before.

She took a handkerchief from her sleeve and wiped her forehead very seriously.

On the cold mountain, even if she was walking nonstop, she logically still should not have sweat very much, not to mention her talent in cultivation as well. Yet when she removed the handkerchief, it was actually somewhat wet.

Seeing how wet the handkerchief was, she shook her head and then smiled.

So even she could become nervous.

She put away the handkerchief, then calmly pressed up against the tree, no longer walking forwards.

Chapter 270 - Past And Present Fate (Part Two)

The sound of the zither wrapped around her body.

She could not see the person who played the zither, and could only hear its sound. However, she could not tell where it was coming from.

The person who played the zither... where was he?

It was a song, that's all.

She took out a square plate and placed it down in front of her.

What that square plate was made of was a mystery, but it was darker than pig iron, yet it was somewhat more gentle than iron. It was like black jade, yet it was somewhat stronger than jade.

The surface of the black square plate was covered with many complicated patterns and lines. If someone who understood them looked at these patterns, they would most likely think of those fake daoists outside the Li Palace that would swindle money from others by pretending to tell fortunes.

Yes, this was a Fated Star Plate used to deduce one's fate.

The intersections of those lines were all positions of stars.

Moreover, in the entire continent, only she and a few other experts could understand that the lines were the trajectories of the stars.

Her two hands rested on the Fated Star Plate, then they began to move. They flowed over the plate naturally, like the wind that called the clouds around the cliff, like the phoenix which bathed its wings in the ocean.

As her hands moved, the patterns and lines on the Fated Star Plate began to move with them. The speed at which the countless rings turned were not the same. Some were fast and some were slow, making it extremely complex. If someone stared at it for a long time, then perhaps the person's eyes would grow blurry or maybe he might even swoon into unconsciousness. However, she did not. She calmly examined the Fated Star Plate, her eyelashes unmoving, not missing even the subtlest change of those patterns.

After who knows how long had passed, she ended her deductions and calculations, and put away the Fated Star Plate. Taking several steps away from the tree, she took out her long bow, nocked an arrow, then shot it towards the end of the path.

With a whoosh, the cliffs in the night were suddenly shocked awake.

The vibration of the bowstring caused that solitary tree to sway even more, as if it had been chopped down.

Then, another long period of time passed.

Nothing changed. It was as if that arrow had disappeared into the void. She lifted her head to stare into the night sky at the place where the arrow had disappeared, and pondered in silence for a very long time.

This was her arrow. Regardless of how powerful the enemy was, even if it was a Star Condensation expert, it still would not disappear without a sound. At the very least, there should be an echo.

For there to be no echo meant that there were two possibilities. Tonight, her enemy's strength far surpassed her own, or the position that she had calculated was incorrect.

The former was impossible, because this was the Garden of Zhou. Furthermore, if the demons had sent an expert like a Demon General, there was no need to wait. He should have long ago taken action.

Then it meant that her calculation were incorrect. She was extremely confident in her deductions. If she really had calculated it wrong, then there was only one possibility. There was a problem with the positions of the stars themselves.

At this moment, she thought of the same sentence that Chen Changsheng had thought of in the front mausoleum of the Mausoleum of Books.

The positions are relative.

The 'relative' indicated that space was relative, that distance was relative. If the space was not real, then there was no way to calculate. So the positions in the space were naturally also impossible to calculate.

Was the solitary mountain path's original destination a false space? Was that clear sound of the zither welcoming her to a land of death—is that why it was so joyous?

She put her hands behind her back and walked over to the cliff edge. As she stared at that distant plain, she began to think.

If the Black Dragon had seen this, then she would definitely understand why that Divine Empress so heavily doted on this white-clothed young lady. It was because her appearance now was very similar to that of the young Divine Empress.

However, the Black Dragon could not see it.

In her eyes, once that young lady had walked under the tree, she had not moved once. She had not taken out her Fated Star Plate to make deductions, and she had not fired an arrow into the night.

Night had finally come to the world outside of the Garden of Zhou as well.

However, the vast sky of stars could not be seen here. It was not because the snowflakes flew around too swiftly, or because the clouds were too thick, but because that shadow cast from Xuelao

City enveloped the entire sky.

The place was too close to Xuelao City. The terrifying Demon Lord did not need to leave the city to exert his will over this area. Turning himself into a shadow, he indifferently observed this human.

If it were a normal human, they would be frozen into a pillar of ice in the instant that shadow arrived. Their spiritual sense would be destroyed, and in the end they would be motes of dust on the snowy plain. However, Su Li did not, because he was no ordinary human.

On his left shoulder was a clear wound, but there was no sign of blood. There was only a pitch-black substance, thick like ink. In addition, the black water was at this very moment gurgling as it boiled.

What sort of poison was this, that it was actually so frightening?

Su Li looked at that distant Demon General who was like a small mountain and mockingly said, "After so many years, and you still can only use such petty poisons! No wonder the only thing you can do is follow and lick the feet of Number One."

In the Demon Army, that Demon General was ranked second. He was the incomparably terrifying Lord Hai Di.

Some sort of fierce battle had occurred, and the second ranked

Demon General Hai Di had managed to leave that horrifying wound on Su Li's shoulder. However, he had paid an even more painful price.

His right arm had been cut off by Su Li's sword.

But there was no pain or anger on Hai Di's face, only indifference.

He said indifferently to Su Li, "Around a hundred years ago, you chopped off one of my limbs, but it only took me ten or so years to grow it back. As for Number One's feet, if she was willing to let me lick them, I would already be kneeling."

Su Li clicked his tongue in astonishment. "Only you demons can be so bold in your shamelessness. But even if you lick Number One until she's comfortable, right now you're missing an arm. Aren't you afraid that Number Three will take advantage of its absence and take your life, then rip you to pieces and eat you?"

Demons were respected for their strength. The picture he described very well could happen.

A voice rang out in the snowy night. It was Black Robe's voice. "This will not happen, because I will not permit it, and His Majesty will not permit it."

Hai Di nodded at Su Li, then took up his arm and began to retreat. With each step, a massive and deep crack formed in the snowy plain. This was the result of his inability to control his Qi

after his wound. It was truly difficult to imagine what sort of frightening strength he had possessed when he was whole. Of course, it was even more impossible to imagine just how powerful Su Li was chop off his arm in one blow.

Although Su Li had won one bout, he still had no opportunity.

Because two more mountainous demon figures slowly began to approach.

Those were the fourth and seventh Demon Generals.

For the purpose of killing Mount Li's Junior Martial Uncle, the demons had set into motion far too many experts.

These were all true experts.

Since the end of that gloomy war which upturned heaven and earth came to an end several hundred years ago, this was the first time such an array of forces had appeared.

Su Li spit out some bloody saliva in front of him, rubbed his somewhat cold cheeks, then said, "A battle, then a battle, and then another battle! Are you guys annoyed? Can't you be a little more straightforward?"

Black Robe chuckled. Although a hat obscured his face, the smile in his eyes that were as deep as the sea was still very clear. The night could not conceal it.

He looked at Su Li and smiled. "You're starting to panic."

Su Lu said derisively, "Only a truly panicked person would attempt this sort of psychological warfare."

Black Robe calmly replied, "Time is slowly passing by. You don't know how long your daughter can hold on. How can you not be panicked?"

At these words, Su Li had no response.

From the start, the corners of his lips had always been perked up. Even during his bloody battle with Hai Di was this so. In this way did he express his contempt and disdain for this demon plot as well as this snowy realm.

But now, the slight smile finally disappeared.

Chapter 271 - Past And Present Fate (Part Three)

Black Robe looked at him, and then his voice penetrated through his hat, like a cold wind from the abyss. "You are prepared to go crazy?"

Su Li was silent for a while, then the smile returned to his face. "What use is there in worrying? And what good would going crazy do? What I should be doing is thinking of ways to live and escape. As long as I survive, then she will also definitely survive. If she can't, then it won't be too late for me to go crazy."

Black Robe was calm and gave no reply. He knew very well that those words were not a threat, but a calm statement of objective fact. If Su Li really did manage to escape this encirclement that the demons had planned for so long, then if his daughter really did die in the Garden of Zhou, he would definitely go completely mad. Not even the Demon Lord wished for such a chaotic sight.

"So I don't need to worry." Su Li raised up his eyes to stare into the deep night. "As long as I live, who amongst you dare to kill her?"

Black Robe chuckled, then said, "Logically, that's the case. But you know, from time to time, I like to do illogical things."

Su Li drew back his gaze, and calmly looked at him. "You're this world's most enigmatic figure, and also the most rational. I don't believe you would do such an irrational thing."

Black Robe calmly explained, "Because I have already promised another person that your daughter must die, so she must die."

Su Li paid attention to the fact that Black Robe had said there was only one person that he had promised to.

"Who?"

Black Robe did not directly answer his question. Slowly, he said, "In the past, the Longevity Sect drowned your true love to death in a cold pool of water. When you returned from the southern seas and learned of this matter, you went into a rage. With your sword, you burst into the Longevity Sect, and in one night, you killed seventeen elders of the Longevity Sect... Everyone knows about this matter, but whether it was your Mount Li Sword Sect's Sect Master, the Holy Maiden, or the Pope, even the Tianhai Empress; none of them could say anything. Because there was a reason for your rage, and furthermore, after you went mad, none of them could do anything to control you. They could only pretend that the incident never happened."

As Su Li thought of those matters of the past, his expression did not change, but his appearance seemed to grow more solitary.

Black Robe continued, "But did you ever think, even though these true experts said nothing and purposely forgot this matter, there were some very weak people that could not forget, who all this time wanted to make their voice heard? Those people that you killed, they also had descendants, those people were also the true

loves of others."

Su Li was silent for a while, then suddenly said, "There's no need for you to abide by your promise, especially to a human."

The moment these words came out, the temperature of the snowy plain suddenly grew colder by several degrees.

Cold indicated that movement had stagnated, that the sword that traveled through the night had gotten somewhat slower.

It also indicated that with his daughter's life in grave peril, Su Li had begun to think of compromise and negotiation.

For Mount Li's Junior Martial Uncle who was well known for his wild nature to signify his willingness to negotiate, this was a huge concession.

And yet, his opponent was not willing to negotiate with him.

"As a schemer, I understand more than anyone else how important keeping a promise is, especially with humans. Only through this can I get more and more humans to believe me. From a certain perspective, my promises are extremely valuable, because they must inevitably be realized, and in addition, they represent Xuelao City's invitation to the entire world."

Black Robe calmly looked at him. "Of course, the most important matter is still to kill you. The dead have no way to go crazy."

The snow continued to fall and the cold night returned to normal. The mountainous figures of the Demon Generals slowly stopped around the perimeter.

In the night, there was the sound of an extremely sharp whistle of the sword.

Su Li patted his scabbard with his hand, and with a light shake of his sleeve, there was only a whistle that approached from the horizon. With a swish, his sword returned to his scabbard, carrying along with it an indescribable sense of confidence.

One of the dark figures on the perimeter began to slightly rock, as if it was a mountain about to collapse, but in the end, it managed to stabilize. Only the cold iron pike in his hands clattered to the ground, sliced in two.

When Su Li withdrew his sword from the night, he used the energy to also break the seventh Demon General's weapon, indicating just how indescribably powerful he was.

However, the Demon General showed no signs of shock, nor of anger. With a frigid voice, he declared, "Su Li, you will definitely die today."

Su Li looked at Black Robe and asked very seriously, "Will I truly die on this day?"

Black Robe replied, "Yes. We've calculated it thirty-seven times. Without a doubt, you will die."

At these words, Su Li was quiet for a very long time.

He wanted to hear Black Robe's answer, because he believed Black Robe would answer truthfully. However, this was not the answer he wanted to hear.

Whether it was the human Saint experts, or that husband and wife of White Emperor City; whether they were willing or not, they all had to admit to one thing.

After Wang Zhice had faded away, the person on the continent most skilled at scheming and calculation was the demon Military Advisor who cloaked himself in a black robe.

The plans created by Black Robe rarely ever failed. Those schemes which he personally took part in had never had a problem.

For example, the time when Emperor Taizong brought countless experts and millions of armored horsemen on a Northern Expedition against the demons. In the end, he was forced to turn back at Xuelao City with no achievements. This person was the Demon race's most accomplished minister.

It had been several hundred years since Black Robe had personally taken part in his plans to kill a human expert, until

now.

He wanted to kill Su Li.

He had calculated it thirty-seven times that Su Li would die without a doubt.

It meant that perhaps Su Li really was going to die.

Su Li also thought this way, but he felt that it did not mean his death was certain. "To kill me, you did so many things. Just what was real and what was fake? Are you really planning to kill those children in the Garden of Zhou, or are you using it as a lure so that I would come and you could kill me? If even you aren't clear on that, then perhaps there's still a chance for me."

"It's all real, but it also could all be fake. But to kill you is the most real thing. Just like you said before, those young ones are the future of humanity. You are humanity's present. I am a vulgar person that lives in the moment, so the first thing I have to do is obviously to kill you."

Black Robe calmly continued, "Tianhai and the Pope, and the Holy Maiden, for the sake of humanity's future, have attempted to unite the north and the south. How is it that even up to now, they have met with no success? How could the south have held on until now? The reason lies not with the Longevity Sect, not with Scholartree Manor, but in you, Mount Li's Junior Martial Uncle Su Li. So, in what way can I not kill you?"

Su Li replied, "If I'm a dead man, the unification of humanity's north and south possesses not a single benefit for you demons."

Black Robe shook his head. "Not wanting to be annexed by the Zhou Dynasty, this is what many southerners think. You are only the southerner's sharpest and strongest sword. Even if the sword is broken, the southerners won't change their minds. On the contrary, Tianhai will change her mind. In accordance with the woman's grand aspirations, if those aristocratic families no longer have you, when they resist the unification of the north and the south once again, she will inevitably bring her armies south and bring all of humanity under her rule. Only the unification of the north and south of that time will no longer rely on the great powers, but on the Zhou Dynasty's armored horsemen."

Su Li had no response. This was an extremely probable scenario, up to the point that he could already clearly envision it.

"On that day, the human world would absolutely be thrown into chaos. Tianhai will bring her armies south, His Majesty will bring his armies south. The south, ah the south... ever onwards to the south. From this cold and snow-filled world to the warm ground illuminated by the sun, that will be a journey filled with corpses and blood. I don't know who will be the final victor, but this is my most desired result."

Black Robe calmly looked at him. "So, please go to the starry sky and reunite with your family. Many years later, when you overlook this war-torn world with dead dragons and an extinct humanity, please remember to say hello to me."

Standing at the edge of the cliff, her hands held behind her, she stared at the silky strands of the clouds. The cold wind cut like a knife, but it was unable to scrape away the exhaustion on that white-clothed young lady's face.

With two days of no sleep and no rest, rushing around the Garden of Zhou saving others while successively using the extremely draining Sacred Light technique, even someone like her should be feeling tired.

Exhaustion was not anything to be afraid of. What she was afraid of was that wariness in the depths of her heart.

The sound of the zither, the tree behind her, as well as the space that enveloped the entire mountain path, made her feel that there was something extremely dangerous out there.

Since childhood, she had cultivated the Dao. Ever since her blood had awakened, this had been the greatest danger she had ever perceived.

She did not have any specific reason. She did not know who was waiting for her at the end of the path, nor did she know for what purpose her opponent had used so much mental strength to design this space to cut her off from the Garden of Zhou.

However, she knew that she should probably break this space.

There was no reason to do it, but she did not need a reason. Since

her opponent had trapped her in a prison, and she wanted to destroy the plan, then of course she should destroy this space her opponent had designed for her.

She brought her finger up to her lips and lightly bit down on it. Then, she realized that she hadn't broken the skin, so she could not help but feel a little embarrassed.

Afterwards, she forcefully bit down, and her slender eyebrows twisted in pain.

As she looked at the beads of blood coming out of her fingertip, she frowned in displeasure.

She disliked the pain, and much less to wound herself.

She placed her hand in the air over the abyss at the edge of the path.

A dark red bead of blood dripped down from her finger and fell towards the wispy clouds below.

As they fell, the drops of blood began to change color. They grew increasingly red and splendid. They continued to grow brighter, until at the very end, they had become gold.

They were like drops of melted gold. Within, they concealed an unimaginable power.

The temperature around the mountain suddenly began to rise. The shallow layer of frost that had just covered the stone surface suddenly evaporated. That lonely tree became even more withered.

The weeds that had grown up with much difficulty in the seams of the cliff instantly burned to ash.

The golden drop of blood fell down upon the clouds.

There was only a whoosh.

A light began to erupt from the clouds. Those clouds were like cotton that had suddenly been set on fire.

A massive fire suddenly blazed up amongst the mountain range, turning the dark night into day.

A single drop of blood had brought about such a magnificent sight.

Was this the power of the Heavenly Phoenix's true blood?

Seeing the newly lit up mountain range, her face was filled with satisfaction, but in the next moment, her brow creased once more.

Biting open her own finger truly was a bit painful.

She brought her finger in front of her mouth and began to lightly blow on it, seemingly very focused.

At the same time, she mumbled to herself as if she were coaxing a child, "Doesn't hurt.....doesn't hurt.....it doesn't hurt, good."

From the day he entered Mount Li to learn the sword, Su Li's fate had been decided. He wanted to protect this peak as well as the entire south. So even if he spent the vast majority of his time wandering the four seas, he would always come back to Mount Li every so often to prove to the Empress in the capital and to the demons even further north that that iron sword was still there.

From the day her blood had awakened, her fate had also been decided. She wanted to protect the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, protect the Eastern Divine General's Mansion, the Imperial Palace and the Li Palace. Now she had added on the Holy Maiden Peak. The things she wanted to protect were truly too many. In reality, they all pointed without a doubt towards that final goal of protecting all of humanity.

How to protect it? On what grounds should she protect it? The most important, or even the sole reason was of course the fact that within her body flowed the true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix. For this reason, all people doted upon her, or revered her, or placed endless hopes and expectations on her. However, no one knew that there were times when she really did not like the fact that within her body flowed that blood.

That blood was too pure, too sacred, so in everyone's eyes, she was also pure and sacred. As a result, she, a person of the Zhou, born in the capital, able to become the successor of Holy Maiden Peak. However, she had never thought of herself as a pure and sacred young lady. The entire continent called her "Phoenix", but she felt that a more appropriate title would be "Vulgar".

She creased her eyebrows and blew on her finger as she watched the faintly discernible outlines of demon horns in the blazing clouds. She thought to herself, "If I wasn't afraid of pain, perhaps I really would try and find some way of pouring out all this blood until there was nothing left." But would it be okay for there to be no blood? There was no way, so she could continue to be afraid of pain with a clear conscience. If this was to be her fate, then she should continue forward and see, and talk about it then.

The clouds had burned into nothingness, leaving only the sky. The cliffs returned to darkness, but it seemed lighter than before. It gave one a feeling of safety.

She continued forward along the mountain path.

For some people, their fate was not decided at birth, or when their blood was awakened, or when they entered the tutelage of some expert or sect.

Somewhat sorrowfully, and prone to bring about an indescribable anger in them, was that their fate was decided by the fate of others.

At the peak that was at the end of this path was the legendary Sunset Valley, the true Sunset Valley.

If someone sat there, he would be able to see the mystical design of suspended light over the plain.

A little girl sat at the edge of the cliff, calmly looking at the plain below. In her indifferent, wooden eyes, there was no emotion.

She was called Nanke.

She was the Demon Lord's thirty-seventh daughter.

When she was born, the Demon Lord was extremely happy, because her body possessed the bloodline of the Peacock. So he gave her the name of "[Nanke](#)".

(TL: 南客 (Nan ke) is another name for the peacock.)

Nanke was a Peacock.

At that time, her fate should have been to be doted upon by her royal father, then becoming the pride of the entire Demon race.

However, when she was one year old, the blood of a girl in the south awakened, and she began to cultivate the Dao.

In comparison, she fell short.

Let alone the fact that she was of the imperial family.

Thus, pride became shame, and even humiliation.

From that point on, her fate had been decided.

To be victorious over her, or to kill her.

Chapter 272 - Bits Of Grass

The dark cliffs, the solitary mountain path, and the pitch-black abyss; there was only the wind that blew head-on, brushing her clothes and her dark hair against her cheeks.

In the deep darkness of the night, her white ceremonial robes were very striking. At the summit of Sunset Valley, the zither-playing old man slowly caressed the fluff that had been disturbed from his zither strings by the wind. He silently thought to himself, "The first song breaks the heart, the second song breaks the soul, and the third song brings the end, and yet even this fantasy couldn't imprison you? Could it be that there truly exists a human with the spotlessly pure Dao heart?"

He was an elder of a shaman tribe of the south that had left it behind. He specialized in spiritual attacks. The sound of his zither could create fantasies that were almost impossible to differentiate from the real world. Especially tonight, he was able to borrow the energy of Sunset Valley, and the fantasy that he created could look far up the river of memories of intelligent beings. He could go far upstream to those most distant, most indistinct, and yet most unforgettable moments of life. Those beings would not want to go back; they would gradually grow intoxicated and sink into those memories. In the end, they would enter a long sleep and become incapable of leaving...

The zither-playing old man did not know that high up above Sunset Valley, the spiritual soul of the Black Dragon had been paying careful attention to all this, and thus had been dragged into a fantasy by his zither.

The Black Dragon saw many scenes from several hundred years ago—that was the remnants of dragon Qi that she innately sensed, that was the assault on her spirit brought about by her recognition of Sunset Valley's original form. When she had been with Chen Changsheng as he looked at Sunset Valley from a distance, she had felt some sort of emotion, that something was calling out to her. Only now did she understand why this world stirred such sorrow within her——The Garden of Zhou had never been only the human's home, it had also been the grave of her father, the strongest Black Frost Dragon in the past one thousand years.

The zither-playing old man knew nothing about this. The fantasy he constructed with his music was targeted at the white-clothed young lady. She was naturally the person he placed all his focus on. As for what the white-clothed young lady saw in that fantasy, he did not know. He only knew that she had not moved for a while now, but she had not sunk into intoxication either. She had only calmly stood under that tree, then saw through his fantasy and easily destroyed it.

She had bitten on her own fingertip, then spilled a drop of blood onto the world that emerged from the sound of the zither. That golden-colored, dignified and sacred blood, that incomparably fierce blood that seemed to hold nigh-infinite power... had easily burned the clouds away, destroying the fantasy weaved together by the music. Was that blood the legendary Heavenly Phoenix's true blood?

The old man looked at the dark mountain path. He was slightly moved, but he said nothing. All of Xuelao City knew of this taboo:

before Princess Nanke, one must absolutely never mention the word 'phoenix'.

"The natural state of life is desire and disorder. There is no such thing as a completely transparent soul. Not even cultivating the Dao can make one's Dao heart spotlessly pure. On the contrary, her spirit is more complex than you could have imagined. Over her Dao heart, she has spread many layers of pretense. Your zither could only touch upon the most shallow layers, so how could they move her? If you couldn't even move her emotionally, how could you expect to confuse her?"

The little girl coldly continued, "Truthfully, I'm very curious. For her to put up so many pretenses, at times being the Holy Maiden and at times being ordinary, will there be a day where she forgets who she is?"

"If that really does happen, then in the future, she will encounter extreme difficulties."

The zither-playing old man was pensive. He lightly plucked at the strings of the zither, and a concentrated Qi emerged with the sound. It continued to separate this mountain ridge from the true Garden of Zhou.

The little girl had never thought that the sound of the zither alone would be enough to imprison her opponent. The white-clothed young lady had used her blood to easily break through the space, but the space still existed. To leave, she would have to meet in person.

To meet in person.

Tonight was the night that their fates would intersect.

As she gazed expressionlessly at the dark mountain path, she said, "For a crazy being like the phoenix, they always die by burning themselves up. But before she burns herself, I will definitely kill her with my own hands."

The night wind blew across the desolate mountain path, causing the ceremonial robes to seem like a great cloak. The white-clothed young lady seemed to be proceeding slowly, but she was actually moving very quickly. Like a crane, she seemed to flutter across, arriving at the summit of Sunset Valley.

There were no stars in the night sky above the Garden of Zhou, but deep within the plains, there hung a dim sphere of light. What was it? She thought about it as she looked at the girl sitting at the edge of the cliff.

The little girl stood up and turned around. "You came."

The white-clothed young lady was astonished. The first moment she laid eyes on this little girl, she had guessed, or perhaps finally confirmed, the identity of her opponent. For her to be so strong at such a young age, she could naturally only be that legendary Demon Princess, Nanke. Xu Yourong was so shocked because she had not imagined that Nanke would actually look like this.

Nanke was about ten years of age, but her appearance was actually rather delicate and pretty, and a childish air still hung about her. She could be considered a rather pretty little girl, except that the space between her two eyes was somewhat wide and her pitch-black eyes were inclined somewhat inward. Moreover, the expression in those eyes was rather wooden. All in all, it made her seem somewhat slow-witted.

She was just like a girl that had grown up in some village. Every day she would go out to the back mountain and gather a basket full of pigweed, then eat and go to sleep until the dawn of the next day, where she would once again gather a basket of pigweed.

Indeed, she was just like a village girl whose life was to go out every day and gather pigweed.

For some reason, the white-clothed young lady thought of this image, even though she had never lived in a village, nor had she ever gathered pigweed, much less even knew what it looked like. But still she thought in such a way.

If this was an intersection of fates, then Nanke had definitely thought of it many times, and Xu Yourong would have also thought about it many times.

She had thought that Nanke would be a proud and aloof Peacock. The legends said that phoenixes could command all kinds of birds, but only the peacock would always be so cold and proud, soaring alone in places where the sun did not reach. She had never

imagined that Nanke would be just like some girl who would go out to gather pigweed every day. She seemed rather slow-witted, rather wooden, and rather pitiful. For some reason, it made people feel sorry for her, going out every day to endlessly gather pigweed.

This also made her seem rather stupefied.

The night wind lightly caressed Sunset Valley and time slowly passed.

She did not know what to say, which made her feel somewhat tense. She felt that she did not know how to confront this girl called Nanke, so she turned to the zither-playing old man.

She was fated to be a true phoenix, so it only took a glance for her to see the truth.

She could tell that the old man was an elder of the Shadow Candle Shamans. Perhaps his fighting prowess was at the peak of Ethereal Opening, but in terms of spirit, his strength far exceeded it. For killing human cultivators in the Garden of Zhou, he was extremely suitable. Of course, the demon Military Advisor would not miss a single detail.

Only, it was a pity.

She looked at the zither on his knees, saw the fluff slightly rising from the strings, and she could only regretfully shake her head.

This was the sacred artifact of the Shadow Candle Shamans that had been passed down for many years——the Precious Jade Zither.

If the Precious Jade Zither was not used to construct this space as well as the fantasy, and was instead used to accompany Nanke in her attacks, then perhaps she really was in extreme danger, and would maybe even die.

Nanke said, "I want to kill you. No-one else is allowed to interfere."

With these words, the little girl's black hair danced in the wind, and it seemed like bits of grass were falling down.

Chapter 273 - Shooting Stars

Nanke's expression was stern yet proud. Her gaze was concentrated and serious. Her eyes were like two sharp awls staring at Xu Yourong. The speed she spoke was not slow, however it did not have any variation in intonation, which made her seem especially apathetic. She clearly had the appearance of a young girl, but it gave an observer the feeling that she overlooked and looked down on all living things, exuding great confidence.

The two most respected, and those who carried the greatest innate talent, in the younger generation of the Human race and the Demon race finally met on the peak of Sunset Valley. It could be said that it was destiny for them to meet each other, or that they were simply willing to meet. The battle was fated to be recorded within the books of history. Before it began, there was definitely a ceremonial feel between the two. Nanke made a salute, and the white-clothed young lady made a salute in return. Afterwards, they began to converse.

“So you are Xu Yourong.”

The night wind on the mountain peak was somewhat strong, so she was unable to hear whether the white-clothed young lady replied “yes”, but... yes, she was Xu Yourong.

She was that reincarnated Heavenly Phoenix, the young expert who had the greatest prospects on the continent of that current day. She was the next Holy Maiden of the south, the junior that the Tianhai Divine Empress loved the most, and Qiushan Jun's most beloved and respected junior. However now, she had an additional

identity that was known by the world—the fiancée of Chen Changsheng, the principal of the Orthodox Academy.

Nanke stared at her and sized her up. Her thin brows were slowly raised, and her indifferent face revealed an unhappy and disappointed expression. “Those mediocre and ignorant people often compare you with me. It was hard for me to avoid being somewhat curious towards you, but upon seeing you today, I’m disappointed.”

Xu Yourong blinked. Her eyes were bright, and she asked somewhat curiously, “What is disappointing?”

Nanke raised her hand and pointed at her. “Just like your current expression of curiosity, it causes people to be just very disappointed. Your mannerism can not be described as magnanimous at all, like a young wife. You are not tall either... I really don’t understand exactly why humans admire you, that even my brother views you as a treasure.”

A demon prince liked Xu Yourong, even though he had never seen her. This was not a secret on the continent at all. What was interesting was that although the humans swore at the demon prince for being wishful, they were not really angry at all, and instead felt proud and joyful for some reason. It was also this which caused Nanke to be unashamed.

To be described as a young wife, Xu Yourong was not angry, and only found it to be very new. Thinking about it again, how did this village girl who cut pigweed every day seem like the cold and terrifying Nanke in the rumors?

However, some of what Nanke had said made her very unhappy—Nanke said that she was not tall. Her stature indeed was not tall; especially with the large white robes on, she seemed even smaller, being loved by the majority.

Xu Yourong pondered a little, and then smiled at Nanke, “But I am taller than you.”

Although she said this while smiling, her tone was very serious.

Hearing that, Nanke’s expression also grew serious. The dullness in her eyes was replaced with rage.

Especially because Xu Yourong raised her head slightly. She seemed to be very arrogant.

She was indeed worthy of being arrogant. How was she not magnanimous?

Nanke’s gaze shifted downwards from her face, and landed on her chest. Staying silent for a while, she said, “To not know shame, you are also unafraid to tarnish the blood within you.”

Xu Yourong felt slightly shy but she continued to smile. She did not respond.

Nanke grew even madder, and said, “You just make me too

disappointed. Just why are you equally as well known as me?”

When she spoke, her black hair danced crazily in the night, actually suppressing the darkness of the night.

In the human world, the name Nanke was very unfamiliar. Only great people like the Pope or the Divine Empress knew who she was, or young people like Zhexiu who often made contact with the Demon race. However, in the land of demons, this name represented great strength and tyranny.

Nanke was one of the youngest daughters of the Demon Lord, however, this was not important. In the long life of the Demon Lord, he just had too many partners. Just the offspring that had their names recorded in books reached a number of several dozen. The reason her name could be so terrifying in Xuelao City was mainly because her innate talent was extremely great, and she was the only disciple of Black Robe.

“You only broke through to Ethereal Opening this year. I succeeded last year, and I am younger than you. As a result, it is very obvious that I am stronger than you.” Nanke looked at Xu Yourong, and said without an expression, “Come, let us fight fairly. Allow me to prove your weakness, to let the entire continent know exactly who can fly higher between us.”

Xu Yourong did not say a word. As the person being challenged, she naturally revealed some sort of tolerance and confidence.

The zither-playing old man always stood silently to one side as a

bystander. He did not dare to turn down the requests of Nanke. Even though he had lived for several hundreds of years, seeing this, he still felt somewhat astounded. From the beginning to now, the fated battle that was destined to shake the entire continent just seemed to be like the argument of two small girls over some insignificant affairs.

Of course, this could not be the entire battle. The battle relied on fighting to determine life and death, and only afterwards could victory or defeat be seen.

At the peak of Sunset Valley, wind suddenly began blowing, bringing chaos to the night. Borrowing the momentum of the wind, Nanke floated swiftly through the air. Her sword was already in her hand, piercing towards Xu Yourong.

Although the surface of Nanke's sword did not seem to have any special features, the sword was actually very special.

This sword was extremely thin, but it definitely was not elegant. This was because the sword was very long—an abnormally exaggerated length. It was even longer than those ancient scholar trees beneath the mountain.

The sword style that Nanke used also did not seem to have any special features. It seemed to be just direct thrust forwards, however, because of its succinctness, it carried unbelievable strength.

The wind immediately began to blow wildly. It blew around the

flat peak, producing a terrifying roar.

In the air several hundreds of zhang above the peak, a single bright stroke suddenly appeared.

In the deep abyss several dozens of zhang below the cliff, a faint, matching stroke also appeared.

That was the border of the space the zither-playing old man had created using the sound of the zither.

With such a level of subtlety and cleverness, even Xu Yourong could not help but temporarily stay within the space. Yet it was directly cut by the sword intent of her simple-looking strike.

Just how overbearing was this sword energy!

The strike arose from several hundreds of zhang away, but it approached Xu Yourong head-on.

Seeing the strike, Xu Yourong did not reveal any expression of surprise, nor did she carry the implications of any vigilance. Instead, she felt that it was very logical.

This was because she knew how strong she was herself, and as a result, she also should have known how strong Nanke was. She was already prepared for this strike.

In the moment Nanke struck out, she had already removed the longbow from her back, and had it standing in front of her.

Perhaps it was due to the fact that the strike was too quick, but she could not manage to pull an arrow from her quiver. As a result, the bowstring was empty.

She brought together two of her elegant fingers, and pulled the bowstring gently yet firmly. Then she released.

The whole maneuver was smooth like flowing clouds and water. However, it was also abnormally succinct and clear, as if every moment of detail could be seen.

The zither-playing old man had already stopped his motions of playing the zither, so the sound of the zither between the cliffs had stopped too.

At this moment, she drew her bow strongly. As a result, the sound of a zither emerged again in between the cliffs.

It was a clear, yet long sound... twang!

From hundreds of zhang away, Xu Yourong drew her bow at Nanke.

However, there were no arrows on the bowstring, so what was shot?

As soon as the sound of the bowstring began, the sound of an arrow resonated in the night sky.

This sound was very clear, and lasted even longer, as if it had already resounded in the night sky for a very long time without being heard, and only now could the world hear it.

An arrow emerged from the depths of the night, and shot towards the area between Nanke's eyes like a lightning bolt.

Where did the arrow come from?

This was the same arrow that Xu Yourong had shot after calculating for a long time from beside the lone tree.

It was believed that because of the obstruction of the space, the arrow had disappeared between the cliffs. However, it seemed that the arrow was actually always flying in the night sky, and only now could it be seen by the world.

The arrow shot from beside the lone tree arose several moments before, and fell at that moment.

A loud bang!

On the peak of Sunset Valley, gravel rolled quickly and powerful Qi radiated in all directions. The dark night was unable to cover up

the streams of air created from the collision.

On the surface of the tough cliff face, countless thin cracks appeared.

Th cracks all originated from the bottom of Nanke's boot.

Her feet were very small, and wore two boots made out of dragonskin. Stepping on the cracks that rippled towards the side of the cliff, they made a very shocking scene.

Those cracks represented the clash between incomparably terrifying powers.

Nanke did not expect this arrow, however, she was able to block it.

Two sword intents that were extremely clear formed a cross in front of her, blocking that arrow that came from within the depths of the night.

The end of the arrow vibrated at a great speed. The two sword intents in the shape of a cross also vibrated with it, and in the space above the flat peak, the arrow actually also began to vibrate, with rays of light being refracted by it.

Behind the Qi was Nanke's face. Her expression was still indifferent, and her gaze was still dull.

With a soft pop, Xu Yourong's arrow was shaken into countless pieces. With that, the two extremely overbearing sword intents also disappeared.

The clear barrier between the two also disappeared. It was unknown whether it was the space created by the old man, or something else.

At this moment, Nanke's dress gently swayed before turning into nothing.

In the next moment, she appeared on the other side of the flat peak, only several dozen zhang away from Xu Yourong. She thrust the sword in her hand forwards.

However, Xu Yourong's speed was even greater.

She did not move, and instead raised the longbow in her hand once again, pulling the bowstring.

This time, there was an arrow on the bowstring.

The sound of the arrow arose from the mountain in the night.

Nanke's dress swayed again, and turned into nothing again. She immediately appeared in another area on the flat cliff.

Whoosh!

At the same moment that she had appeared again, Xu Yourong shot her third arrow.

This arrow did not hit Nanke either, and only hit the night wind. Afterwards, it disappeared into the deep night sky.

Seeing Nanke's extremely weird and unexplainable movement technique, Xu Yourong finally revealed a cautious expression for the first time.

However, this did not impact her speed of drawing and shooting at all. Her movement was still succinct yet natural, and did not seem like she was in a battle.

Nanke's movement technique was too fast.

Xu Yourong's shooting technique actually had the same level of speed as Nanke.

If normal people watched the battle, they would only see Nanke disappear from her original location, and then appear in the next moment in a different place. Similarly, they would not be able to see what Xu Yourong was doing. In their vision, they could only roughly see the quiver in the night sky shake slightly, and see countless images of Xu Yourong drawing the bow. However, they would be unable to see what she was doing.

Only by putting these images together could the real world be seen.

The real world that only belonged to her.

However, if Chen Changsheng was shown this battle, he would be able to understand it very easily.

Xu Yourong treated the Icebreaking Sword of the Holy Maiden Peak... as a shooting technique to be used.

As for Nanke, what she used was the strangest and most unfathomable technique of the entire continent... the Yeshi Step.

Also, she did not use the simplified version of the Yeshi Step that Chen Changsheng had used his unbelievable memory and willpower to learn—it was the complete version of the Yeshi Step. It could even be considered as the perfect version of the Yeshi Step. Compared to the demon expert who was sent to assassinate Luoluo before, it was unknown how many times better her movement technique was.

Logically, it was impossible to learn the complete version of the Yeshi Step if one was not a part of the Yeshi Clan, let alone the perfect version. However, Nanke was a part of the royal family, so she naturally carried the bloodline and talent of the various clans in the land of demons. Speaking from this sort of idea, cultivating was never a fair matter.

Xu Yourong's cultivation level did not fall below Nanke's. Her shooting technique that was rarely shown in the world was even more exquisite and unparalleled, conforming to the natural laws. Facing up against Nanke's slyfully wonderful and indescribable foot technique, she stayed silent and did not panic in the slightest bit. With the sounds of the bowstring and the sounds of the arrows shot out, it actually prevented Nanke from advancing.

However... the arrows in the quiver were limited, and there would also be a moment when it would be emptied.

This was reality, and reality meant that it would definitely occur at a certain moment. Perhaps it would be the next moment.

In the next moment, Xu Yourong's quiver became empty.

She was no longer able to influence Nanke's weird movement technique.

With a great sound, Nanke's figure blurred between real and fake, and arrived in an area several zhang in front of Xu Yourong.

An extremely overbearing and powerful yell exploded out from Nanke's petite body.

At the same time, an extremely bright sword ray exploded forth.

That sword ray of several inches in length originated from her tightly grasped long sword.

The sword ray drew a circular arc in the night sky, and chopped violently at Xu Yourong's body.

The sword ray carried sword energy of unparalleled domination, directly sealing off all of the other directions around Xu Yourong. It actually gave the victim a feeling that even if they wanted to dodge, they could not avoid it.

The night wind on the peak of Sunset Valley blew violently, and the sword ray was bright like lightning.

Xu Yourong's hair band was invaded by sword intent, and was cut silently. Her black hair fell onto her shoulders.

If she was hit by the sword ray, she would definitely die.

How would she receive this strike?

She extended her hand towards the sword ray.

That hand was very white and very elegant.

Compared to the violent and terrifying sword ray, it seemed tiny and weak.

However, her expression was still so calm, so confident.

Past the bright sword ray, she stared calmly into Nanke's eyes.

Her hair danced gently in the breeze created by the sword.

A shapeless Qi exuded from her hand into the night.

The Qi was very warm and did not carry any killing intent. It was as if it was summoning something.

Suddenly... hum hum hum hum hum

In the night sky surrounding the peak of Sunset Valley, countless shrill sounds of arrows suddenly resounded.

Over ten arrows pierced through the night sky, arriving from all directions.

These arrows were all the arrows she had shot previously. They seemed to have disappeared into the night sky, but just like the first arrow she had shot on the mountain path, they had never flown off, and were only waiting for her summoning.

She extended her hand towards the night sky.

Over ten flowing lights appeared in the night sky, and like shooting stars descending from the sky, they rushed at Nanke.

Chapter 274 - Wutong

Over ten shooting stars fell from the sky, faintly illuminating the night. At the very head of these stars, the seemingly burning arrows could be seen very clearly.

Nanke's face remained cold and wooden, but her eyes suddenly contracted. Her hands tightened their grip on the sword, but there was not enough time to strike at Xu Yourong, so she thrust it at the night.

Thrusting at the night sky was one movement, and if she remained still, it would only be one image. However, her sword thrust countless times at the night sky, creating a compilation of countless images.

Nanke held her sword high, perpendicular to the night sky above her. Her eyes were fixed several zhang away at Xu Yourong, but countless sword glows circled around her body, turning into a nigh-perfect sphere of light.

The surface of that sphere was covered with countless tiny lines. Every one of those lines was a sword.

Those arrows-turned-shooting stars exploded upon that sphere of light made of swords.

A series of muffled booms like thunder rang out from the summit of Sunset Valley.

Nanke's dragonskin boots created countless cracks on the hard ground of the cliff once again, but this time they were even deeper.

Those arrows had all been blocked by her sword and were sent flying back, but this time they did not disappear into the night. Rather, like spirits, they whistled and glowed as the arrows once again attacked!

Those arrows turned into a rain of arrows, incessantly bursting at Nanke.

Bang bang bang bang bang bang. An incomparably dense collection of sounds rang out at the summit.

The sound was the crisp sound of metal, the strange and ear-splitting sound of a sword scraping against a hard surface.

The summit was filled with countless sparks, even lines of sparks. Those were where the arrows collided with the sword.

However, not a single arrow could draw close to Nanke's body. Not even the momentary and elusive sparks could float into that sphere of light created by swords.

The floor of the mountaintop was covered with scars created by those arrows, some deep and some shallow. They densely covered the surface, like the marks left on the sand by a torrential rain.

She continued to stare out of the sword glow at Xu Yourong, holding her longsword up high, as if she was not even moving.

But in every instant, she was producing countless swords.

Extending towards Xu Yourong's location, those slender sword images behind Nanke began to turn into a semi-circle.

Like a peacock spreading its tail.

Seeing those sparks fly about the mountaintop, hearing those clashing sounds, the zither-playing old man was so moved that he was speechless.

At the moment, all of Nanke's energy was on her longsword. Xu Yourong's spiritual sense was even stronger, controlling that rain of arrows that filled the sky, and yet even she would find it difficult to block any other attacks. The battle had seemingly come to a deadlock.

What truly moved that old man was the spreading tail created by Nanke's longsword.

Only then did he realize that the princess had already reached this step. Sure enough, she was worthy of being called the strongest amongst the younger generation of the imperial clan.

When cultivators entered the Star Condensation Realm, the greatest difference was that they each would possess their own

domain—it could even be called their own world. This was called the Star Domain.

In the Star Domain, no one could injure the cultivator unless they used overwhelming power to forcefully shatter the domain.

The demons had a similar way of speaking, but the experts of the imperial clan possessed a domain of their own. However, it was not called the Star Domain. It was called the Moon Ring.

Because of Nanke's age, her strength was not yet sufficient to summon the complete Moon Ring. But with her nigh-perfect swordplay without any gaps, she could use that perfection to make up for her lack of strength.

That sword tail that was opening at the summit of Sunset Valley was her Moon Ring.

Now that old man no longer had any worries about this battle.

Because no matter how strong Xu Yourong's innate talent was, it was still restricted by her cultivation. As long as she remained in Ethereal Opening, she would never be able to injure Nanke.

This signified that, in the battle, Nanke had entered into an invincible position.

In his astonishment, the old man thought, the Military Advisor must have known about this for him to give the heavy

responsibility of killing Xu Yourong to Her Highness.

As expected, His Lordship's plans took everything into account.

The zither-playing man no longer worried, but he forgot one thing. To not lose did not mean victory.

Confronting Nanke who used swordplay to imitate the Moon Ring, Xu Yourong displayed perfection, and this perfection was absolute perfection.

Whether it was the frequency at which the arrows rained down or the light that suffused each arrow, it was all perfect.

Even though Nanke had spread her sword tail, she could only hold one. She had no opportunity to counterattack.

For the prideful Nanke, this was an unacceptable fact.

Her purpose in entering the Garden of Zhou was to defeat Xu Yourong, to kill Xu Yourong.

The whistling continued, and the arrows continued to rain down. Sparks continued to flash around the summit. From a little further away, all those streams of light seemed like scars. At any time they would gradually fade away, then in the next moment many more scars would appear.

The unbearable sounds of metal scraping on metal and the terrifying sounds of powerful attacks echoed in Nanke's ears.

She stared at Xu Yourong, her expression wooden, but the dullness in her eyes gradually began to sharpen.

Suddenly, she closed her eyes. Then with a hint of madness in her voice, she gave a mighty shout!

"AH!"

Accompanying the shout, the light around her body grew even brighter, and her sword energy suddenly increased by several times.

With a set of disorderly bangs, her body suddenly disappeared, then reappeared. Piercing through her own sword tail, she thrust at Xu Yourong.

She cared not for the surrounding rain of arrows. She used her entire body as a sword to strike at Xu Yourong.

Even if her sword struck true, the arrows like streams of light would also pierce through her body. The battle had in this way swiftly reached its most dangerous moment.

The zither-playing old man's expression suddenly changed, and he quickly stood up from his zither.

Because of her honor as the demon princess, she had heedlessly thrown her all into this attack. Just how mighty would it be?

This attack of Nanke's had two strands of clear light.

Those two sword glows seemed about to intersect at Xu Yourong's position.

The old man's face paled, and he exclaimed with shock, "Southern Cross Sword!"

In the world of humans, it was impossible to see the demon's moon.

In the demon realm, they could see the stars that hung above the heads of humans, but because of their location or some other reason, the starry sky that the demons saw was not a vast sky of stars. Instead, it was two starry bands, like silver rivers.

Those two rivers of stars intersected in the night, just like a cross.

Relative to Xuelao City, the starry sky was to the south, so the demons called it the Southern Cross.

The attack that Nanke aimed at Xu Yourong, the two strands of starlight, was a technique famous in the demon realm, the

Southern Cross Sword.

The old man even knew that the longsword in Princess Nanke's hand was the famous Southern Cross Sword.

One sword was the technique. The other sword was the weapon.

Nanke used the Southern Cross Sword to execute the Southern Cross Sword.

A powerful sword intent pierced through the air, but before it arrived at Xu Yourong's body, there was a distant shattering sound in the night sky.

The zither-playing old man's pale face suddenly flashed with pain, and his body swayed.

That was the sound of the space shattering.

Soon after, deep within the plains below Sunset Valley, the bizarre, suspended light also began to sparkle. The rays of light that it cast were slightly deformed, evidence of the fact that space was warping.

Nanke's attack... had already reached the maximum limit the Garden of Zhou would permit, and perhaps was even about to cross that line.

The arrows that had become like streams of light pierced swiftly through the night. To the naked eye, they seemed like a majestic rain of arrows.

Nanke released her Moon Ring and turned the sword tail into an attack. This was the equivalent of exposing herself to that fearsome rain of arrows.

If Xu Yourong could withstand her terrifying Southern Cross Sword, then it would be Nanke's turn to be in grave peril.

The problem lay in the fact that the Southern Cross Sword possessed a monstrous power and the Southern Cross Sword in Nanke's hand was a weapon famed for its military might in the demon realm. If it had appeared in the human world, it would definitely have ranked within the Tier of Legendary Weapons.

Xu Yourong only had a wooden bow, so how could she receive it?

With a sound like that of the zither, the bowstring snapped.

The bowstring had snapped towards the bottom. Like the stamen of a flower, it curled up and fell on Xu Yourong's wrist.

She took the bow and thrust it into the ground in front of her.

There was a muffled bang as the the hard rock suddenly fragmented. The longbow entered the earth, then it seemed to sway in the night wind, as if it had turned into a tree.

Boom!

The mighty and fearsome Southern Cross Sword chopped at the longbow.

This bow was very long, so it did not give off a very sturdy feeling. Moreover, it was clearly constructed of wood, and yet, it managed to block that attack!

This was a summit with only bare smooth rock, so this tree was inevitably alone. It was just like that tree she had seen on the mountain path.

The mountain path was a fantasy, so the tree that she saw was the tree that she wanted to see.

The tree that she had seen on the mountain path was a wutong tree.

And right now this longbow was also a wutong tree.

This bow was a divine weapon on the Tier of Legendary Weapons.

The Wutong, Holy Maiden Peak's powerful magical artifact, was placed thirty-first and thirty-second on the Tier of Legendary Weapons.

How could a magical artifact take two places? Because the Wutong was not one magical artifact, but two.

Those arrows that whistled through the night as they attacked were the leaves that fell from the wutong tree. They were called the Wu Arrows.

The longbow in her hands was the Wutong Tree's firm and upright trunk. It was called the Lonely Tong.

The Wu Arrows and Lonely Tong.

My sword, the Lonely Tong.

It was a king's weapon. If one was not a Saint or a king, one could not use it.

But Xu Yourong could use it. In fact, it might be only her that had the ability to use the magical artifact to its fullest extent.

It was for the same reason that she saw that tree on the mountain path as a wutong tree.

She was a phoenix, which lived on the wutong.

She was a natural-born king.

The light scattered like a wave smashing against a reef, splashing in all directions.

There two powerful Qi clashed, illuminating the entire summit of Sunset Valley, as well as illuminating each other's eyes.

Xu Yourong looked at Nanke with a calm expression, silent and powerful.

The Lonely Tong had blocked the Southern Cross Sword, but what of the Wu Arrows?

Whistling through the night sky, a rain of arrows fell towards Nanke.

Nanke's sword was entangled with Xu Yourong's longbow, so how could she avoid the rain? Just as was said before, if she could not end the battle with this attack, then it was her turn to confront this absolute danger.

At this moment, an unimaginable scene took place.

Nanke's two hands, which were intertwined around the sword hilt, separated. One sword went to resist Xu Yourong's longbow, while the other sword recreated the sword tail and defended against the Wu Arrows.

The Southern Cross Sword was actually two swords!

Just like how the Wutong was actually two magical artifacts.

Tonight, the summit of Sunset Valley overflowed with light and unceasing whistles.

This was an unimaginable battle. In terms of ferocity, of course it could not compare to that heaven-shaking ambush occurring outside the Garden of Zhou that was rarely seen in a hundred years, but it was more engrossing.

Just like the rumors had said, whether it was in terms of cultivation or will, they were both extremely similar. Even their weapons and methods were similar. Just like they had imagined, they had finally met, then battled. Phoenix and Peacock, Wutong and Southern Cross Sword; who would obtain the final victory?

If there truly was such a thing as destiny, then the two were predestined rivals. Anyone that saw this battle tonight would believe this without a doubt.

If there had been no one to see this battle, then it would be to the entire continent's regret.

It was a good thing that this battle had a spectator.

Every wrinkle of the old man's face seemed to express shock and admiration.

It was not only aimed at Nanke, but also at Xu Yourong.

He had never witnessed such powerful innate talent and battle prowess.

Let alone the fact that they were both so young.

The Wu Arrows faced off against the sword tail. The Southern Cross Sword grappled with the Lonely Tong. Right now, the battle on the cliff had once again entered a stalemate. It was just a matter of who could hold out to the end.

The zither-playing old man knew this very well, so he stood up in admiration.

A fair battle? Just like how demons never believed in a human's tears, they thought it was a hypocritical phrase, with absolutely no meaning.

Yet when Nanke glanced at him, even if it was out of the corner of her eye, her gaze was still cold like the snow.

Demons never believed in things like fairness and justice, but she believed in pride.

Thus, the old man retreated.

The summit of Sunset Valley glowed continuously with light. It came from the sparks created by the clash of the Wu Arrows against the sword. It came from the streams of light created by the clashing of Qi from the sword and the bow.

Between the sparks and the streams of light, Xu Yourong's ordinary but delicate face seemed to grow brighter and calmer. This signified her self-confidence.

An impressive Qi arose from her white ceremonial robes, astoundingly bright.

Nanke's eyes were still somewhat dull, but they grew more severe, more focused, and more frigid.

Suddenly, a clear cry emerged from her lips.

That sound was young and tender, and yet it was filled with immeasurable pride. It signified her uninhibited arrogance.

That was a peacock alone in the depths of a swamp viewing the distant numerous birds with a glance of contempt.

Without a sound, a strand of blood flowed out of her hands, smearing the hilts of the Southern Cross Swords.

The blood she bled was not red, because she was not a human. However, it was not the green of a normal demon either. Her blood was a splendorous blue.

Her blood was not disgusting. Rather, it possessed a bewitching beauty.

That blood seemed to be very cold, like a piece of flowing ice, slowly enveloping Nanke's hands and the hilts of her swords. Then the blood began to burn, but the flames were unexpectedly also cold!

The icy flames fiercely burned on her two Southern Cross Swords.

In a flash, the Wutong Bow was covered with a layer of frost, which in the next moment gave birth to countless icy thorns.

The place where the bow met the ground began to fiercely shudder, creating several cracks, as if signifying that it could not hold on much longer.

Is this the true blood of the surpassing bird? Xu Yourong silently thought.

Then, her brows slightly creased.

It was not wariness or unease, and even less so fear. Rather she was preemptively fearing pain.

Bleeding truly was somewhat painful.

She did not like pain, so she did not like this way of battling.

But since Nanke had already sent her the invitation, she had no means of refusing, because she even less liked to lose and to die.

Because of the pain, her brows knit tighter and tighter. It seemed rather pitiful, but her eyes seemed to grow increasingly bright, and her expression grew increasingly calm.

A drop of blood slowly flowed out of her finger and fell onto her bow.

The blood she bled was red, because she was human, but after the wind touched it for only an instant, it turned gold.

That blood was like liquid gold, supremely dignified and sacred. It seemed to hold a boundless energy and warmth.

The Wutong Longbow in this way began to blaze.

The frost and icy thorns instantly melted into blue smoke.

Chapter 275 - Blood Battle To The End

The peacock is called nanke, and is also called the [surpassing bird](#). When describing innate talent, the latter is often used.

TL: Peacock can be 孔雀 (kongque, which is often used), 南客 (nanke) or 越鸟 (yueniao, surpassing bird). The latter two are rarely used to describe peacocks.

The blood that flowed within Nanke's body was the true blood of the surpassing bird. This kind of blood was cold to the bone, so cold that passing wind would turn into frost. When compared to the cultivation methods of the sects in the snowy mountain in the north-west, it is unknown how many times the blood is naturally colder by. Other than the blood of the black frost dragons, it is impossible to find a substance that is colder than it. The even more terrifying part of the blood of the surpassing bird is that it is extremely poisonous, so poisonous that even the strongest monsters are unable to resist against it.

The brightly colored blood dripped from Nanke's wrist onto the sword hilt, and then it fell onto the Wutong Longbow. An ordinary person would have died immediately at the moment before, however, Xu Yourong did not. She was not frozen by Nanke's blood, and also did not become poisoned by the toxins within the blood. This was because she was the reincarnation of a Heavenly Phoenix, and inside her body flowed the true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix. Her blood carried inexhaustible heat, able to burn everything.

The battle on the peak of Sunset Valley reached the final part, and Xu Yourong and Nanke finally began their contest of innate

talent. In the previous clashes, they had already proven that no matter if it was the level of cultivation, the strength of willpower and spiritual sense or the aspect of sword and shooting techniques, their abilities were almost completely equal. Now, they could only look at whose blood would burn the world or freeze the world.

In the land of demons, in the world of humans and in the White Emperor City by the shores of the Red River, there were countless legends that the phoenix was the king of all birds. Logically, Xu Yourong almost would definitely be the final victor in this contest in innate talent. However, it could not be forgotten that in the countless legends, there was always the peacock that looked at the world of birds with a cold and proud gaze. That peacock never obeyed the orders of the phoenix.

If the phoenix really could be victorious over the peacock so easily, how could the peacock disobey it and have its own cold pride and freedom? This explained a very simple truth, which was that between the peacock and the phoenix, the biggest difference was their temperament and the different choices they had made in the world. As for the strength of their bloodline, it was actually extremely close.

Xu Yourong and Nanke's blood continued to flow, smearing all over the sword hilt, blade, and bow and discoloring them. Afterwards, it fell on the surface of the peak between the two, and those tough rocks also began to burn swiftly.

The entire peak of Sunset Valley began to burn. No matter if it was the bright, golden holy fire, or the mottled, dark, icy-cold fire; they were all true flames, as if they were even able to burn the

spirit.

The two incredibly powerful Qi rapidly increased with the clash between the two noble yet proud bloodlines. The space created by the zither-playing old man could no longer withstand it, and with countless sounds of shattering, it transformed into countless pieces of clear glass, before disappearing into the night sky.

A wave of light rushed out in all directions from between Xu Yourong and Nanke's bodies, immediately illuminating a radius of several hundreds of li, and lighting the Sunset Valley mountain range like daytime. The wide grassland in front of the mountain range suddenly brightened up, especially in the outer borders. Those weeds also seemed to begin burning, and those cold, broken terrifying sounds in the depths of the grassland also immediately disappeared. Countless great monsters hidden within it felt that the wave of light that originated from the peak carried two incomparably noble and powerful auras, deterring them from daring to perform any reckless actions.

"It really is impressive," Liu Wan'er said with great surprise, looking in the direction of the Sunset Valley.

The Demon General couple were outside the grasslands to prevent Zhexiu and Qi Jian from escaping. After eating dinner, they were currently washing the dishes. However, they never thought that on a mountain peak far away, such a terrifying battle was currently happening.

Teng Xiaoming put the bowl into the basket, and asked, "Should we go help out?"

With the strength of his spiritual sense, he could clearly feel exactly how intense the battle on the peak of Sunset Valley was. That golden flame that originated from the true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix was just too bright.

“We won’t make it.” Liu Wan’er shook her head. “Also, Her Highness does not like it when we make unnecessary moves. Since the Military Advisor has already said that Xu Yourong will die, she will definitely die.”

With the breaking of the space that separated the peak of Sunset Valley and that lonely mountain path from the world of the Garden of Zhou, the Black Dragon which flew extremely high in the air was able to see what was below for the first time. Only with this did she know that Xu Yourong had already left, and this fated battle had already begun.

At this moment, many people in the Garden of Zhou had already noticed the battle on the peak of Sunset Valley. Although they could not see the details and did not know who was battling whom, the wild flames on the peak and the terrifyingly powerful auras that originated vaguely from the flames were enough to disturb and shock them.

However, the Black Dragon was unperturbed. She looked down on the two girls between the mountain range, and the gaze from her pupil was very cold and indifferent, or even vaguely scornful. If she was not a spiritual soul at that moment, and instead in her real body, it would not matter that the battle between the two girls was so intense and lively. A casual dragon breath from her could

probably put out all of the flames.

“A small, small world with two small birds playing with fire. Ants praise how great their countries are and discuss how easy it is to shake a big tree.”

She laughed at them with these words, but in the next moment, she discovered that the aura that flowed from the burning blood and flames on the peak of the Sunset Valley actually gave her pause... as it turned out, those two girls were not normal small birds. If they had fully awakened their bloodline, they would actually be on the same level as her.

On the peak of Sunset Valley, the two noble but completely different bloods mixed together. Two flames that varied between light and dark also mixed together. This was the so-called blend of blood and flames. Beyond the layers of flames and above the light of the sword and bow, Xu Yourong and Nanke's eyes met. They were faintly linked mentally.

In that moment, Xu Yourong saw many images: the images of inside Xuelao City, the images inside the demon's palace and the images of the growth of the pigweed-harvesting girl.

Conversely, the images Nanke saw were very few. She only saw the small stone bridge in the Divine General of the East's estate, the catkin beneath the bridge and the school yard of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green.

Nanke did not cover up anything. She was cold and proud, not

scared of anyone, even if an opponent like Xu Yourong saw her true inner self. For some reason, intentional or not, Xu Yourong, who should have led a brighter life, concealed in her consciousness many of the scenes from her years of cultivation..

“The phoenix indeed is a hypocritical organism. You actually lived in such a petty way and still want to become the ruler that sits on the decaying throne? Why don’t you just go die instead?”

Nanke looked into her eyes, and spoke coldly in the world of consciousness formed from the connection.

Xu Yourong did not follow up, and asked calmly, “You want to perish with me?”

Nanke replied with an indifferent expression, “I am not afraid of death. You are afraid of death. So if we perish together, the one who dies first will definitely be you.”

Xu Yourong arched her brow slightly. She disliked this method of battle, and also disliked the way Nanke spoke. She believed that life and death were things worthy of respect, and should not have been spoken of so lightly.

Nanke stared at her. “You humans always believe that rubbish: great power comes with great responsibility. Since it’s like that, you don’t want to die, because you still carry a lot of responsibilities on your shoulders.”

Xu Yourong asked levelly, “What about you? As a Demon Princess, don’t you also need to carry a lot of responsibilities?”

Nanke replied indifferently again, “I have several dozen siblings. The responsibilities I carry are extremely few, other than my own aspirations and my master’s hope.”

Xu Yourong stayed silent for a while, before saying, “Does your father know about this? If you die today in the Garden of Zhou, won’t something occur between your master and your father?”

In this simple conversation, life, death, and responsibilities were discussed. However, no principles were discussed, as they each only wanted to let their opponent know why they did not fear death, and the reasons why the opponent should have feared death.

The conversation occurred in the linked world of consciousness, and the attacks were also spiritual.

It was very obvious that what Xu Yourong had said after thinking did not achieve any of her imagined results. Nanke’s expression remained indifferent, and she did not care about her own life and death or the future of the demons at all.

“My race needs a strong succeeding generation and the glory of victory. As long as I can kill you, it will prove that the blood of my race is the most noble. How can Father be sad or disappointed? He will only compose a few long poems happily in front of my gravestone.”

Saying that, Nanke took a step forwards. Her indifferent gaze was full of determination, and between the hands holding the sword hilt, the rate of blood flow suddenly increased.

With her step forwards, a crack appeared on the mountain several hundred zhang away. A boulder with a circumference of several zhang fell into the deep abyss.

The Southern Cross Sword grew even brighter. One was in front of her, like a true galaxy, and one was behind her, like a peacock spreading its tail, blocking the arrows flying in from all directions.

The cold yet bright blood transformed into numerous flames, burning violently on the cliff. Her expression was still just as indifferent, as if she could not feel pain, nor fear death.

She looked into Xu Yourong's eyes, and finally said in the world of consciousness, "You are indeed very strong. In order to kill you, of course I have to bleed so much."

Xu Yourong's expression remained calm, with not even a sliver of weariness to be seen. However, after two days and two nights without sleep, rushing around in the wild to use her Sacred Light to save people, she was actually already very tired.

How could she win against the crazed Nanke?

Only through blood for blood.

A slight thought set fresh blood flowing from her palm that grasped the longbow, like water from a spring. The holy, golden flames burned fiercely, allowing the freezing peak to warm up again.

That holy and powerful aura was rapidly released from within her body.

The two powerful auras clashed, rushing into the night sky above Sunset Valley.

Only a soft pop could be heard from somewhere far away. In the depths of the night, there was a surface that seemed to be transparent. Suddenly, a crack appeared, and afterwards, a shooting star descended.

This was the Garden of Zhou, so the shooting star could not have been a real meteor, but it was not a Wu Arrow either. That meteor landed somewhere to the side of Sunset Valley, and only a huge bang could be heard. The entire mountain range began to shake, and a mountain on the side of the mountain range completely collapsed.

Xu Yourong and Nanke looked at each other, and ignored it.

Their fresh blood constantly flowed, and their aura constantly increased.

More and more sounds of shattering reverberated in the night sky, creating more and more meteors, falling towards Sunset Valley.

Chapter 276 - Death Of The Phoenix

The spatial barrier of the Garden of Zhou began showing signs of collapse.

This was an inevitable effect of their battle. The sources of Xu Yourong and Nanke's bloodlines were just too powerful, and at that moment, they had pushed the rate of burning their lives to the extreme. The Qi they gave off already surpassed the peak of Ethereal Opening, reaching the maximum that the rules of the Garden of Zhou allowed.

Of course, the Garden of Zhou would not collapse, as the rules responsible for maintaining the functioning of the world would just directly destroy the threat, which was the existence of Xu Yourong and Nanke.

The weapon that the Garden of Zhou used was the shattered fragments of the spatial barrier.

The barrier fragments left the night sky, transformed into meteors and fell towards the peak of Sunset Valley.

If Xu Yourong and Nanke did not stop their battle and instead continued to allow their Qi to increase, then they would definitely die. They would become the dust created by the countless meteors along with Sunset Valley.

They would die.

Nanke was very clear on this point. Before, when she used the Southern Cross Sword on Xu Yourong, it had already caused the warping of space within the Garden of Zhou. This allowed her to confirm the maximum capacity that the Garden of Zhou could hold. Her plan was to increase her level of strength beyond this maximum, forcing Xu Yourong to also increase hers, before also exceeding the maximum capacity of the Garden of Zhou.

This was her method of battle.

This represented her absolute mindset for battle.

Why would her teacher, the extremely cautious Military Advisor of the Demon race, Black Robe, give her such an important mission to kill Xu Yourong? This was because Black Robe understood extremely well that she was willing to die with Xu Yourong.

Her fate was determined because of Xu Yourong. As a result, she invited her opponent to walk towards the end of fate together with great happiness. This was because it meant that she could also determine the fate of Xu Yourong.

Thus, Xu Yourong would definitely die this night in the Garden of Zhou. Although the human girl definitely did not want to accept it, she could not do anything. If she continued to burn her true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix, countless meteors would fall on the world of the Garden of Zhou, bringing death. If she stopped, then she would be killed even faster by Nanke.

This was a fated battle, an unavoidable battle. The end of the battle had already been predetermined, just like that, sad and frustrating.

It seemed as though nobody could change everything.

However, on the peak of Sunset Valley, there was always a bystander.

The zither-playing old man was silent. Watching the battle up until now, he finally could not bear it anymore.

He was extremely certain that Nanke's method of battle definitely gained the recognition of Black Robe, however, he was even more certain at the same time that the Demon Lord did not know about this at all.

He was unable to watch Nanke die in front of him, because he did not want to suffer the wrath of the Demon Lord afterwards. Even more than that, he did not want to see his clan, that had survived through hardships, pushed into the deep abyss by the wrath of the Demon Lord and unable to ever rise up again.

As a result, his hand landed on the zither strings, and played a note very seriously and solemnly.

Hearing this note, a sliver of anger flashed across Nanke's indifferent gaze. Only a while later did it slowly return back to her indifference—she did not allow anyone to interrupt her battle with

Xu Yourong. However, at this moment, all of her willpower and energy was spent on Xu Yourong, unable to prevent the zither-playing old man from helping her.

A matter that cannot be changed can only be accepted.

What calmed her was the matter that could not be changed tonight. That was dying with Xu Yourong.

The sound of the zither hummed. It was very warm, but afterwards, it instead carried killing intent.

The sound of the zither entered her ear, and Xu Yourong's complexion became even paler. Countless frightful billows and terrible waves arose in her sea of consciousness, causing her to almost drop the Wutong Longbow, and allowing Nanke to chop at her body.

The mental attack of the elder who originated from the Shadow Candle Clan was extremely powerful and scary. But she needed to put her efforts into defending against the even scarier Nanke. She actually suffered a heavy blow from her.

A stream of blood dripped slowly from the corner of her lips.

It was different from the blood that originated from her finger holding the longbow. The blood did not originate from her consciousness, and was not due to her purposely burning her life. Instead, it was caused by injury.

Her gaze remained calm, and it remained focused. She looked silently at Nanke, without even glancing to the zither-playing old man at all. Her left hand pierced through the night wind, falling towards the night.

It was not a shapeless, mystery technique that could hurt her opponent without contact. She only swung her hand at the night.

There was nothing in the night, so what was she swinging at?

In the next moment, a black square plate suddenly appeared in the night sky. The black square plate floated silently beside her shoulder, as if it was always there, but nobody had noticed it.

This was Xu Yourong's Fated Star Plate.

Her left hand landed in the centre of the Fated Star Plate.

She did not gently move her finger. At this moment, there was no time to calculate exactly what her fate was.

What she wanted to do, what she could do, was only to attempt to control her own fate.

She had accumulated for a long time, ready to give Nanke a mortal strike of forceful true essence. She poured everything into the Fated Star Plate with this swing.

A muffled bang.

This bang sounded like a gong, specifically like a broken one. The sound was not nice, and it was slightly muffled.

However, it was very loud.

This was the sound produced by the Fated Star Plate.

This was the strong sound produced by fate.

The powerful wind of the peak blew wildly. Other than the rapid circulation of the trajectory of stars and lines of fate that nobody could understand, the flash of light produced by the Fated Star Plate transformed into countless dazzling rays of light.

The sound of the zither that was like gurgling, flowing water was forcibly smashed by this sound of a broken gong.

Several strings on the zither snapped.

The complexion of the zither-playing old man became pale, as if he had been hit by a heavy blow. He vomited blood.

To slap fate into chaos and to heavily injure the opponent. Xu Yourong's blow seemed to be understated, but in reality, it had reached an unbelievable level of strength. However, she also paid a

great price for this.

Nanke's childish voice arose again, and the Southern Cross Sword once more divided into three.

Xu Yourong's hand which held onto the Wutong Longbow began to shake violently. Her gaze was still calm, but it was not as bright as before, and seemed somewhat gloomy.

The change most striking to the eye was that more and more fresh blood flowed from the corner of her mouth.

The zither-playing old man circulated his extremely powerful spiritual sense, forcefully suppressing the injuries he received in his sea of consciousness. He immediately suppressed the wild true essence within his meridians, and with a long roar, he acted again.

He drifted away from the zither, and his two hands directly landed on Xu Yourong's head. In the night, he could only see the faint white light radiating from between his fingertips, as if there was no flesh at all, with only white bone remaining.

After creating the powerful sound from slapping the Fated Star Plate with her left hand, she took the opportunity to grab hold of a corner of the plate.

She did not know what abnormality the hands of the elder of the shaman clan carried, and thought that it was definitely extreme poison. Without even thinking, she flipped her hand and smashed

towards the front of the opponent with the Fated Star Plate in her hand.

This smash seemed to be very simple, just like kids fighting. However, it was actually not simple in the slightest.

This was the final move of the Sword of Hithering Light from the Heavenly Dao Academy.

The Sword of Hithering Light was known for its speed and sharpness. The speed of the final move had already reached an unbelievable level. Because of its speed, it seemed extremely simple.

Xu Yourong's Sword of Hithering Light was better than the Sword of Hithering Light learnt by any student of the Heavenly Dao Academy.

Her swing was faster than the final move of the Sword of Hithering Light performed by any student of the Heavenly Dao Academy.

It was so fast that the zither-playing old man was not even able to avoid it.

The muffled sound of collision resounded. The zither-playing old man attempted to use his hands to block against the Fated Star Plate in her hands. His finger bones were immediately shattered. He was knocked backwards for over ten zhang, unable to stop

vomiting blood.

Xu Yourong also felt that effect of the collision, and her gaze became even more gloomy.

Nanke's gaze remained as prudent and indifferent as it was, however, it had brightened up like never before.

The zither-playing old man suffered heavy defeat from a single blow, but it had helped her gain the best opportunity in the entirety of that night.

A childlike outcry once again reverberated through the entire cliff.

Nanke's body suddenly turned into nothing, her sword barrier dispersed. She did not pay any attention to the dozen or so Wu Arrows, and brought her hands together. She fused with the Southern Cross Sword, piercing at Xu Yourong.

Whoosh Whoosh Whoosh Whoosh, the Wu Arrows pierced through the night sky.

Thunk Thunk Thunk Thunk, the dozen or so arrows penetrated her body.

Nanke's expression did not change, as if she could not feel pain at all.

Two extremely bright sword rays chopped towards the front of Xu Yourong like two galaxies.

A sound of rubbing resonated. This was the sound of the bottom part of the Tong Bow piercing through the rock.

In the end, the Tong Bow was unable to block the power of the Southern Cross Sword, leaving the ground.

The longbow that left the ground was just like a rootless wutong tree. It immediately drooped slightly.

The bright sword rays pushed the bow down, chopping at the left side of Xu Yourong's chest. Fresh blood spurted out.

Although it had reached such an important moment, Xu Yourong's gaze remained calm. With a flip of her wrist, the horizontal longbow knocked away Nanke's blow, sweeping backwards urgently in the air.

How could Nanke give her the opportunity to leave? Afterwards, she brushed forwards like a shadow.

The Tong Bow and the Southern Cross Sword clashed. It created countless streams of turbulent wind in the night sky.

Nanke was covered in blood, but her eyes were even brighter.

Both of her hands left the hilt of the sword, and extended forwards like lightning.

The point of her fingers carried a gloomy green flow.

The peacock had one tail feather. It was the most poisonous, sharpest and fastest in the world.

This was the Peacock Plume, the true Peacock Plume.

Nanke's ten fingers pierced into both of Xu Yourong's shoulders, going as deep as the bone.

Blood spurted out in all directions. However, many black spots seemed to appear in the golden light.

Painful, so painful, it really was very painful.

Xu Yourong had never experienced such pain.

As a result, she became extremely mad, a madness that had never occurred before.

With a ripping sound, her white ceremonial dress was torn into myriad fragments.

Countless rays of gold light hit Nanke's body in the direction of

her fingers.

Densely-packed sounds of muffled collision began to resound.

Innumerable finger holes appeared on Nanke's body, and the bright blood flowed rapidly.

Peacocks had plumes.

Phoenixes had feathers.

This was Xu Yourong's feather barrage.

All of their cultivation was used.

All of their weapons were used.

All of their life-saving abilities were used.

All of their true essence was consumed.

All of their blood had almost bled dry.

The battle was this desperate and this absolute.

The peak of Sunset Valley fell into silence. The dust between the

cliffs slowly settled, but the spilt blood continued to burn. The fierce heat and coldness fused and disappeared, causing the brightness to reach the limit.

Xu Yourong stood on the side of the cliff. Her complexion was slightly pale and her clothes were covered with blood splatters.

Nanke seemed even more miserable. She was covered with injuries, and blood flowed ceaselessly.

However, she was victorious.

An uninterrupted, clear howl resounded from the peak of Sunset Valley.

Her voice was that tender, but it was also that cold.

This clear, cold and proud dominance actually gave one a mad feeling in the end.

Although it was somewhat regretful, victory was the most important matter.

Although experts had helped out, death was the fairest judge.

Both Xu Yourong and she were already expended, but in the next moment, Xu Yourong would die.

In this night, she had finally defeated her destined opponent.

This meant that she had defeated her own fate.

The sound of the surpassing bird slowly decreased in volume until it finally stopped.

Nanke returned to the indifferent appearance of how she was before, and said slowly, “My blood is in your body. Behind you is an endless abyss, so you are definitely dead.”

Xu Yourong stood on the side of the cliff. The night wind lightly blew her hair.

She lowered her head and did not know what she wanted to say.

Just what posture was she supposed to take to face death?

“Please give me this glory.”

Nanke looked at her, and said seriously.

Xu Yourong raised her head and looked at her. Within her gaze was a sliver of relief and the undertone of making fun of something, like understanding the affairs of light thoroughly. She was like an old person, calmly waiting for death, but seemed even more like a mischievous young girl.

“Why should I let you be happy?”

After saying that with a smile, she turned around and walked into the night beyond the cliff.

Looking at the empty cliff, Nanke's eyes revealed a sliver of disappointment. She said while staring blankly, “Are you an idiot? Do you think that you really are a phoenix?”

Xu Yourong was the reincarnation of a Heavenly Phoenix, and not a real phoenix.

She did not have a pair of wings, and never cultivated to Saint Realm. Naturally she could not fly freely.

She walked towards the night beyond the cliff. Naturally, she fell into the abyss of death.

There was a period of silence, regardless of cliff or elsewhere.

Xu Yourong...the reincarnation of the Heavenly Phoenix. Even in the recent dozen or so years of the blossoming age, the most beautiful flower without a question, the girl viewed as the leader of the future by everybody and the girl viewed as the greatest threat by the demons would just die silently like this in the Garden of Zhou?

Nanke walked to the edge of the cliff, and gazed into the pitch-black abyss. She thought silently, even if you had to die, you are

not willing to die by my hand? Is this your final pride or is it returning to self-realization?

The Black Dragon was silent in the clouds. She disliked humans, with Chen Changsheng as basically the only exception... Especially after learning about the later matters told by the spirit of her father, she was even more hostile to the human experts, which naturally included Xu Yourong, that person who may have become the strongest human girl in the world. Logically, she should not have felt any sympathy or sadness to Xu Yourong's death, and she had even remembered very clearly that Chen Changsheng had said many times that he did not like his fiancée. So why did she feel slightly frustrated, or even slightly disturbed? If she let Chen Changsheng know that she had personally seen Xu Yourong's death, but did nothing at all, would he blame her?

Xu Yourong fell into the abyss of death. Her eyes were tightly closed, and the sound of wind rushing by her ears was so far away. Blood once again flowed from the corner of her lips, burning as it met the night wind. It formed a string of bright flames that drifted downwards, however, it was only able to illuminate a small area around her, unable to illuminate the path in front.

Was the ground getting closer and closer? Death was also getting closer and closer, but how was the mountain in the Garden of Zhou so tall? Just how far did she need to fall before she gained peace at last?

No, death was the end. There was no peace. It was not the other side of the sea of stars she had pursued with cultivation.

She jumped off the cliff not to send herself to death. It was only that she did not want to die in the hands of the pigweed-harvesting girl.

Just exactly how could she not die?

She closed her eyes and thought about this question. Just where was the answer?

She fell faster and faster, and the wind blew faster and faster.

The more she thought, the colder she felt, frustrated and unable to do anything.

Suddenly, she remembered something the Divine Empress had said to her all those years ago when she left the capital.

“Young phoenix, one can fear pain, but one cannot fear death... especially you.”

Afterwards, she opened her eyes.

Chapter 277 - The Cry Of A Phoenix

A shadow loomed over both the interior and exterior of the Garden of Zhou.

On the snowy plains deep within the night, there were only countless snowflakes in the night sky, without a star to be seen. However, what could be clearly seen was the shadow that extended out from Xuelao City.

The shadow was even darker than the black night, and even colder than death. It represented the willpower of the Demon Lord. Regardless of how dazzling the sword ray that passed through it was, it was unable to break through it in a short amount of time.

However, the sword ray was already powerful enough, even already possessing the strength to resist the shadow. Although it was unable to chop the shadow, it could easily chop through a lot of other objects.

For example, the arm of the terrifying third Demon General, and the throat of the seventh Demon General.

The seventh Demon General held onto his throat, and like a mountain, he slowly began to fall.

The sword ray once again returned, entering the sheath, and dispersing its Qi.

However, no matter if it was the seventh Demon General at death's door, or the other demon experts, their expressions were not affected at all by this scene. This slaughter of certain death was full of the faint feeling of intimidation.

Su Li lowered his head. It was not known what he was thinking. He held onto the hilt with his right hand. His black hair had already fallen onto his shoulders. In the chilly wind of the night, it gently floated about, like a god or a demon.

Black Robe's gaze pierced through the deep ocean, landing on his body. He said, "Your daughter is about to die, and you are also about to die. How does it feel?"

What he said was undoubtedly a psychological attack, and could even be regarded as a very crude and simple psychological attack. However, simplicity did not mean that it did not carry power. Black Robe used these words in attempt to break his mental state.

Su Li raised his head and looked at Black Robe. He said calmly, "Since you want to kill me, why must you let those other guys participate in the battle in turns? Constantly shoving wood into the fire will only result in it constantly being burnt to ash."

"As long as the wood added is enough, there will always be a moment where the fire is extinguished," Black Robe said indifferently. "Perhaps this method of battle may result in an even greater price, but it can guarantee that you will definitely die."

Su Li did not say anything, because he knew what Black Robe had said was correct.

The shadow that originated from Xuelao City cut off his connection with the human world, and demons still had a lot of true experts that did not act, such as the legendary Demon Commander, or Black Robe, who only sat there patiently. In order to kill the Junior Martial Uncle of Mount Li, the demons had made very careful preparations.

These preparations had even involved the interior of the Garden of Zhou and the faraway western continent.

No matter what countermeasure the experts of the human world and the experts in White Emperor City had, it was already too late. The pressure of the Demon Lord was ready, and the Council of Elders in Xuelao City was also waiting.

This type of killing method was to grind and kill. Black Robe needed enough demon experts to forcefully grind away Su Li's sword intent and Qi. It was such an easy and even slightly dry method to kill the opponent.

This was because only this type of method could have no accidents occurring.

“You are the most dazzling star of the human world after the great war. You have already brought too many unforeseen incidents to this continent, and you know, I dislike unforeseen incidents the most.”

Black Robe said while looking at him.

Su Li stayed silent for a very long time before saying, “No, I will not die.”

Black Robe’s voice rose slightly, obviously because he was slightly interested. He asked, “Oh? Why so?”

Su Li looked at him and said calmly, “There is no basis nor reasons, I just believe that I will not die. Similarly, I believe the girl, and those children that represent the future of mankind will also not die.”

Black Robe said, “I admire such unreasonable confidence in the face of death very much.”

Su Li began laughing again. His pupils reflected the snowy sky, as if it was about to burn.

One can fear pain, but one cannot fear death, especially you... why? Perhaps death was even more gruesome than pain? And why was the word ‘especially’ said? Why could she not fear death?

In the process of falling into the abyss of death, Xu Yourong thought about this sentence and the many matters it gave rise to.

Suddenly, she understood some ideas, and as a result, she opened her eyes.

Why was she the last one to fear death? It was because she was the phoenix. Her fate was already destined to constantly forge her own spirit between death and pain, until a certain moment where she was able to calmly accept death. Only like that could she accept a real, new life again.

Was this the meaning of life in death? Empress, was this what you wanted to tell me? In that moment, Xu Yourong felt the endless abyss in front of her eyes suddenly begin to glow.

At that moment, her body was heavily injured, her true essence was all consumed and extreme poison currently invaded her body and mind. However, the idea she understood allowed her to calm down to a point which she had never before reached.

Constantly falling, the blood from the corner of her lip was blown backwards like a line of fire by the wind.

Countless pearl-like balls of light also arose from her eyes.

Falling towards the depths of the abyss, she calmly waited for death to come.

Calmness was a dauntless attitude, but it was not unknowing. She felt the cold gloom of death, experienced the true meaning of death and then began to fear it once again.

This type of fear did not mean that she had left the mind state of being dauntless. It was still a form of awareness, a distinct yet clear awareness that was deeply embedded in her consciousness.

Only the great fear brought on by death could stimulate the unimaginable power hidden in the deepest part of her consciousness, the power hidden within her bloodline.

This endless power began to burn, causing her to enter a strange state of clear-headedness and absent-mindedness. As death slowly arrived, a spirit deep within her body awakened.

This was the spirit of the Heavenly Phoenix, which was also her spirit.

That was the her that she had never seen, nor even discovered before.

She opened her eyes and looked into the pitch-black abyss and the real, invisible yet cold night wind. It allowed her to truly understand fate.

Fate allowed her to leave the Holy Maiden Peak and come to the Garden of Zhou.

However, fate did not make her meet Nanke, and instead made her meet herself.

To meet the other self, the truest self.

The journey was not for nothing.

In the process of falling into death, an infinite amount of regret bloomed.

In the deathly abyss, in the silent mountain cliff, on the extremely tall Sunset Valley, in the vast world of the Garden of Zhou, a clear cry suddenly resounded.

The sound was not mature, and was slightly undeveloped. However, it was incomparably clear.

Compared to this clear cry, Nanke's clear roar earlier immediately paled.

This clear cry was the cry of the young phoenix.

The aura of the king was carried in this phoenix cry without a question.

Nanke stood silently by the cliffside, perhaps in memorial for the death of her fated opponent, or in regret that her life would be lonely from now on.

After a while, she turned around and walked towards the flat rock surface between the cliffs.

The person had already passed away. Although there was the expected disappointment and hollowness, there was even more satisfaction in the end. From this night forwards, there would be no-one able to fly in the same sky as her. This was very worthy of being happy over.

Then, the cry of the phoenix pierced through the cliffs.

She stopped her steps, and turned around to gaze into the night sky beyond the cliff. She revealed an expression of inconceivability.

A pair of flaming wings appeared in the night, illuminating the cliffside. It took Xu Yourong flying towards the faraway distance.

Chapter 278 - Wolf Howl

Two wings of fire spread out in the night, flying far off into the distance. They were exceptionally striking, reminiscent of a moving star illuminating its surroundings.

Nanke stood at the edge of the cliff and silently viewed the scene, her face abnormally pale. She had forcefully suppressed the injuries left behind by those numerous feathers, but no matter how she tried, she could not suppress those feelings of anger and unwillingness in her heart.

An elegant and yet exceptionally ruthless peacock cry emerged from her lips, resounding into the distance, as if was calling something. Upon hearing this, the zither-playing old man suddenly changed his expression. He wanted to extend his hand to stop her, but because of his injuries, he could not get up. He could only look on helplessly as in the next moment, Nanke leaped off the cliff.

The clear cry of the young phoenix rang out through the Garden of Zhou. In the three gardens at the edge of the Garden of Zhou, many human cultivators had gathered. Previously when that bloody battle at the peak of Sunset Valley had brought about many anomalies in heaven and earth, many people had turned their gazes towards Sunset Valley. Naturally, they had also not missed the cry of the phoenix.

In the quiet and dark mountains, there were still several upper level Ethereal Opening human experts searching for treasures in the gloom. Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong had searched for

them for two days and nights, and yet had still been unable to find them. The warning fireworks of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green could not make them reveal their tracks. Amongst the cultivators was a three-hundred-year-old loose cultivator from the south. At the moment, he was by an ancient scholar tree. Based on records from the past, he was searching for a powerful magical artifact left behind by the southern shaman tribe. When he heard the sudden cry of the phoenix, he turned around in amazement, his elderly appearance illuminated in the light of those wings of fire. Within those turbid eyes of his appeared an expression of shock, which turned into boundless greed.

With Qi Jian on his back, Zhexiu continued to walk through the plain. His eyes could no longer see, but his hearing was still effective. When the phoenix cry rang out, he stopped. Qi Jian's eyes opened with some difficulty and looked west. He said with some perplexity, "Is that Senior Xu? She also entered the Garden of Zhou?"

"It should be her." Zhexiu's ears listened to the echoes of that phoenix cry and confirmed.

All these things that had happened after the Garden of Zhou opened were a part of the demon plot. Of the targets that the demons had drawn up to kill, Xu Yourong was definitely amongst them. Qi Jian said weakly, "I don't know who the demons sent to oppose her, but... it should be okay."

Xu Yourong and Qiushan Jun were not ordinary young geniuses.

Their innate talent was overwhelmingly dominant. In this miniature world of the Garden of Zhou where there was an upper limit, logically the demons should be unable to seize Xu Yourong. But when thinking about the assassination attempt at the lakeside and Third Brother's sudden betrayal, Qi Jian could not help but be very worried.

Zhexiu thought about those two women at the lakeside who had completely different features and yet seemed like they had been born as twins. Perhaps it was because of their fingertips suffused with green, or because of the poison that still restlessly stirred within his eyes, but he knew that those two were definitely Nanke's two wings. He said, "Nanke has come. The one that Xu Yourong is fighting is definitely her. It's just that I don't know who won and who lost."

In all of the continent, amongst all Ethereal Opening cultivators, human or demon, the only one that could threaten Xu Yourong was Nanke.

Hearing the name Nanke, Qi Jian's face paled even more. After a long moment of silence, Qi Jian said, "So where are we going next?"

It was already night, but the sun of the Plains of the Unsetting Sun had not set—if that mystical and indistinct sphere of light suspended over the horizon could be considered a sun. The powerful Demon General couple stood guard at the edge of the plain, so they could not leave. They could only walk around in this plain. Then, where should they go? Everyone said that the Plains of the Unsetting Sun concealed many vicious and frightening

dangers. At the very least, anyone that entered had never come out. Then where were the dangers hidden?

Zhexiu said, "Take out the Flowing Water Bottle."

Qi Jian took out the Flowing Water Bottle and said in disbelief, "We've already spent six hours in here?"

The warm and red yet indistinct sun hung over the edge of the plain. At the line that divided heaven and earth, it continuously revolved. The light that it emitted did not change, so it was easy to lose track of time. However, what shocked Qi Jian was not only this. Although Zhexiu was heavily injured, he had not yet decreased his speed. In six hours, they could travel at least a hundred li, and yet they could clearly see the fire that arose from the summit of Sunset Valley. The cry of the phoenix was also like it had sounded out right by their ears. Now when they turned back, the mountain...was still there.

Although they had walked through the plain for six hours, it still seemed like they had just entered.

Hearing what Qi Jian had said, Zhexiu lowered his head in thought for a very long time.

To the two youths, the legendary plain was finally beginning to reveal its strange and sinister side.

Suddenly, a rustling sound arose from deep within the grass in

front of them, as if some beast was just then traveling through.

In the next moment, the sound disappeared, but this did not mean the danger had passed.

Qi Jian was somewhat uneasy, feeling that within the grass, there were always many things gazing at them.

Zhexiu lowered his head and inclined his face, listening to the sounds coming from the grass. As he did so, his face grew increasingly grave, as well as unsightly.

He had grown up on the snowy plains and hunted monsters for a living. So he could very clearly tell that these noises were the sounds of monsters walking or flying low, or the grinding of their fearsomely sharp teeth, and even the dripping of their saliva on the ground. What was even more frightening thing was that in a short period of time, he had heard at least seven monster sounds that belonged to powerful monsters rarely seen on the snowy plains.

On the snowy plains, he was the hunter, but in the plains of the Garden of Zhou, the monsters had made him and Qi Jian their prey. This caused him an intense discomfort as well as anger. He knew very well that if he remained stationary like this, it would be very dangerous.

He lifted his head towards the depths of the plains.

His eyes could not see and his pupils could not focus, so he

seemed very cold. Moreover, the bewitchingly strange green had occupied his entire pupil, creating an extremely frightening sight.

Qi Jian was leaning against his shoulder, saw his profile, and subconsciously felt cold and fearful. Qi Jian's body began to tremble.

"Don't be afraid." Zhexiu said expressionlessly.

As the words fell, a succession of grinding sounds emanated from his body. This was the sound of his bones and muscles grinding and reassembling. Copious coarse wolf hairs sprouted from his cheeks, and his knees once again strangely bent backwards. His teeth gradually grew long and pointed, emerging from his lips.....this was his demi-human transformation.

Along with the transformation of his body, his Qi also suddenly changed. A cold and cruel aura pervaded the path in front of him.

The quiet depths of the grass suddenly erupted with noise. This was closely followed by the stamping of feet as well as a haughty and provocative roar.

The monsters of the plains were particularly sensitive to this wolf youth's transformation, and their response was very fast.

After Zhexiu transformed, his pupils turned red, mixing with the Peacock Plume's poison, once again producing a lemon-like yellow.

He could not see a thing, but he calmly aimed his eyes forward, as if he was staring into those monsters' eyes.

A cruel, powerful, and ruthless howl burst forth from his lips, spreading swiftly across the plain.

The chilly wind brushed against the grass, and swathes of grass fell flat, allowing the figures of many monsters to faintly be seen.

Those monsters heard strength and the resolve to fight to the death within that howl. With another set of rustling, they finally scattered.

Qi Jian leaned against Zhexiu's shoulder, somewhat afraid of Zhexiu's current appearance, although Zhexiu had said to not be afraid.

Thus, he wrapped his arms tight around Zhexiu and pressed his face closer. He said to himself, this way I can't see it, so I won't be afraid.

Perhaps because of his actions, or because of those greedy gazes the monsters aimed back as they left, Zhexiu's body grew somewhat stiff. His voice was somewhat unnatural. "We... have to think of a way to leave, or else the truly powerful monsters, upon hearing my howl, will come over to see."

Qi Jian assented, thinking to himself, we'll do whatever you say.

The wolf youth's wild howl echoed throughout the Plains of the Unsetting Sun, but it did not leave the plains. This miniature world that was the Garden of Zhou had always had many bizarre and inexplicable places. Just like that phoenix cry that resounded through heaven and earth, not even it had really been transmitted to every nook and cranny of the Garden of Zhou. This was because there were some places that were like a world within a world.

At the end of that river, on the other side of that cold pool under the waterfall was a lake. The lakeshore was another world.

The people within that world did not hear the cry of the phoenix. Liang Xiaoxiao and Zhuang Huanyu were no longer in the forest, but where they had gone was a mystery. Deep under the calm surface of the lake, its depths still seemed to boil. Countless fine bubbles burst forth from between those two wings of light, then swiftly disappeared.

Chen Changsheng had been bound up by the two wings of light of those two beautiful yet frightening women, so naturally he could not hear the phoenix cry. Even if it had arrived at his ear, he would not have let it affect him in the slightest. Because at the moment he was quickly being turned by those two wings of light into a very bright yet lifeless pearl. He was like a mosquito caught in a spider web, about to die at any moment. His heart and soul were all focused on finding a way to live.

Where was his path to live? If there was no way, he would have to use his dagger to cut a way. The problem was that he currently had no strength to grip his dagger, much less cut through those wings of light. Did his way to live lie in that elusive but

incomparably real sword intent in the lake? But if he wanted to make the strand of sword intent come to him, how could he do so?

Before he was bound up by those wings of light, he had attempted to ignite the water outside his Ethereal Palace, but it was meaningless. Just like his initial struggles and flips, it seemed rather ridiculous. His throat was being held by the demon beauty, while his body had been restricted by the dignified woman. Those two wings of light gave a desperately frightening pressure, suppressing the last of his true essence and his every movement. He could not even move a finger, nor even blink his eyes. He could only feel the chilly water brush against his eyes. It was not a good feeling. These two women, uniting their bodies, finally displayed their terrifying strength and cultivation. His Qi grew increasingly feeble; his mind grew increasingly dim. As he saw the two faces of those women illuminated by the light of the wings, he felt them to be extremely sinister. He thought to himself, is this what the god of death looks like?

At that moment, he who had even his true essence suppressed by those two wings of light could only move his spiritual sense. Before the moment of death, Chen Changsheng would never surrender. Of course, he would try to use his spiritual sense to escape, but the problem lay in the fact that he had not cultivated to that masterly realm where he could kill with his mind. No matter how calm and steady his spiritual sense was, he still could not use it in battle.

What could his spiritual sense do? Before he had clearly thought about this, his spiritual sense had already rested on his dagger.

Noiselessly, several boxes appeared in that world that had been

created by those two wings of light.

Chapter 279 - The Sword Calls

The boxes were very heavy. The moment they appeared, Chen Changsheng and those two women began to descend even faster to the lake bottom.

Astonishment crept into the eyes of the two women. They had no idea how these boxes appeared or what was in them.

The boxes were not locked, so under the pressure of the water, their lids tore open, illuminating their contents in the gentle and beautiful light of those wings. At the same time, the items within the boxes began to emit their own sort of gentle and beautiful light.

It was an almost sacred white light, holding an unimaginable amount of magic, at least for humans.

If this were not such a tense and perilous moment, perhaps even those two women would also think this way.

The boxes contained silver, and the light they emitted was called silver light. It was even more real than starlight, even more enticing, and thus, more beautiful.

The silver came from various places. Some was gifted to Chen Changsheng by his master and senior before he left Xining Village for travel and living expenses, some was given to him by Luoluo as when she was paying respects to him as her teacher. There was also some from Tang Thirty-Six's generous donations, as well as

generous gifts from various priests from the Li Palace. Chen Changsheng had never counted up exactly how much silver there was. He just had them converted into silver ingots and carried them with him.

Now, when his life was at its most perilous moment, he had used up all the silver in one go.

In the space formed by those two wings of light, the rushing of the water caused those silver taels to roil about. Like stone, they pounded against the faces and bodies of all three people.

However, this was still not enough; it was not sufficient to break through those wings of light.

He still needed more things.

Thus, Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense continued deeper into the hilt of the dagger.

The next thing to come out was a Night Pearl.

The Night Pearl was very large and very round, even more than the Night Pearls embedded into the Dew Platform, even more than the Night Pearls that attached to the roof of the Black Dragon's underground cavern. The Night Pearl had been Luoluo's first gift to him, and it looked very much like a big washing bowl. Of course, for those two women who had grown up in Xuelao City, perhaps they would be willing to use the sacred moon to describe this

extraordinary Night Pearl.

Only, the two women could not be like ordinary women, being shocked and moved, then fall into a fervor. One reason was because they were engaged in battle. The other reason was that the Night Pearl directly smashed against the demon woman's face. Even in the water, the boom could be clearly heard. Soon after, that demon woman's nose began to bleed a stream of green blood.

The demon woman was filled with rage, and also very confused. She simply had no idea where this Night Pearl had come from, and its impact was not light.

But this still was not enough. It was not sufficient to help Chen Changsheng escape the constraints of those wings of light.

Thus, Chen Changsheng continued deeper into the sword hilt, taking out item after item.

The next item to appear....was half of a whole roasted lamb.

The half a roast lamb, from which steam still seemed to rise, appeared within those wings of light, then collided with that dignified woman's body.

It was very obvious that the dignified woman was somewhat of a clean freak, so when that half roast lamb caked with oil embraced her, she almost went crazy.

But this still was not enough.

One roast chicken, two roast chickens, three roast chickens... around a dozen roast chickens, like thrown stones, appeared between those wings and smashed at her body.

There was Liaobei County's roast deer tail, Wanzhou County's roast fish, Wenshui's spicy thirteen plates, the South Sea's steamed double fish heads...

With the continuous stimulation of Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense, innumerable pieces of food appeared one after the other. In a flash, the space between those wings of light was crammed.

These were pieces of food that the Black Dragon had required him to prepare when they left the capital. Right now, the Black Dragon was merely a spiritual soul inside a jade ruyi, so she could not eat very much.

Thus these foods had been stored away, extremely fresh, very hot and pungent, and still maintaining their original flavors.

Within those wings of light, roast chicken took flight with duck wings, red soup blurred together with persimmons.

It was complete confusion, absolute chaos.

Countless foods and juices mixed together, producing a revolting mix.

"Just what's going on here?!"

That demon woman pushed her head through a Yingou stew jade cabbage and angrily shouted, her eyes expressing bewilderment.

The last thing Chen Changsheng took out was that which he possessed the most of—books.

Nobody knew that the three thousands scriptures of the Daoist Canon were no longer in Xining Village's old temple, but rather with Chen Changsheng.

He took out the three thousand scriptures of the Daoist Canon so that he could use the scriptures to beat the demons.

Boom!

Countless books filled up that space created by the two wings of light.

The two wings of light could no longer stay closed.

Accompanied by a cry of shock and even a little absurdity, those two wings finally separated.

The books and food shot off in all directions like powerful arrows, then gradually slowed down.

Regretfully, even though the wings of light had come apart, those two women still held Chen Changsheng tightly. He continued to sink towards the bottom of the lake.

Those books and food, the Night Pearl and the boxes of silver, all sank with him, creating an exceptionally strange scene.

The Night Pearl was not far from him. It illuminated the pitch-black water, letting him see very clearly some of the things that were falling with him.

Those books and food, the Night Pearl and the silver, the various herbs: they were his living, his memories. In other words, they were his life.

Seeing the items, he very easily remembered those days more than ten years ago in Xining Village's old temple where he recited the Daoist Classics with his senior by the riverside. He remembered the little girl that climbed the wall from the Hundred Herb Garden to the Orthodox Academy. As he sunk towards the bottom of the lake, he thought of many things and many people.

The rich Tang Thirty-Six, the poor Xuanyuan Po, Jin Yulu drinking tea by the gate of the Orthodox Academy, the Pope, Mei Lisha, master, senior, are you still doing okay?

Then he saw a letter and a little trinket, and this made him think of the white crane.

As he continued to sink, it grew colder and colder, and death grew closer and closer. His Qi grew increasingly weak, although judging by his still-open eyes, he seemed very calm.

His eyes were so clean that even in the water, they still gave off the impression of a clear and limpid lake, able to reflect one's innermost thoughts.

This sort of calmness and cleanliness made those two women feel an unprecedented unease. It was like that first day in which they possessed life and still saw Nanke's cold and indifferent appearance.

Amongst the items that were sinking to the lake bottom with Chen Changsheng, the brightest was obviously the Night Pearl. They did not notice that behind the radiance of the Night Pearl was a metal ball. Through the gentle movements of the water, the metal ball slowly landed in his palm. He subconsciously drew his fingers together and gripped it tightly.

The extremely faint and elusive sword intent was still in the deepest depths of the lake, seemingly calling him, wanting to him to cut open a path to live. Yet his blood had almost run dry, his Qi was about to disappear. Even if he could perceive it, what use was it? Even if he could grip that metal ball, he had no means of taking out the Yellow Paper Umbrella, so what use was it?

Suddenly, the metal ball fiercely shuddered in his hand, then began to quickly spin.

With a clamor, the scales on the metal ball split open, then with the clashing and rubbing of metal, an umbrella swiftly bloomed in the water, splashing water in all directions.

The Yellow Paper Umbrella was once more in Chen Changsheng's hand!

Only now did the two women realize, but they were too late.

The Yellow Paper Umbrella began to quickly revolve, stirring up the water. The seemingly dull edge of the umbrella scored countless deep and bloody wounds on the bodies of those two women.

With cries of agony, the two women were jolted apart by that powerful force.

The water at the bottom of the lake stirred once more, and once again it seemed like it was boiling. The Yellow Paper Umbrella brought along the finally unconscious Chen Changsheng as it barreled through the lake like a dragon made of water, breaking open a path. It hurtled swiftly towards some place several li away.

That elusive sword intent was there.

The strand of sword intent had never been calling Chen Changsheng. It had been calling the umbrella!

Chapter 280 - Meeting In The Night Sky

The ice-cold lake water splashed onto his face, just like countless, sharp blades.

After an unknown amount of time, Chen Changsheng finally woke up. He attempted to open his eyes, but his eyes were only hit painfully by the incoming lake water, so he could only close them once again. He did not know of the current situation, and only knew that he was in the water of the lake, travelling at unimaginable speeds. From the feeling in his hand, he confirmed that the Yellow Paper Umbrella had saved his life.

The Yellow Paper Umbrella was an inanimate object, so how could it act by itself? To him, it was a very hard question to understand. The faint sword intent that was transmitted from somewhere ahead allowed him to vaguely guess something. However, he was unable to make a link between the sword intent and the Yellow Paper Umbrella—that sword intent should have belonged to the legendary Sword Pool, which should have disappeared for several hundreds of years in the Garden of Zhou already. As for the Yellow Paper Umbrella, it was a new object that the Junior Uncle of Mount Li, Su Li, had requested the Wenshui Tang Clan to make for him. The two objects had a difference in years, so logically, it was impossible to make any connections.

After another period of time, he became even more clear-headed, and fixed his posture with great difficulty. It allowed him to squint his eyes open, upon which he saw the light not far behind him. Only then did he learn that the dangers had never left him. At the same time, the injuries that could not be seen in his body began to ache, clearly sending the feeling of pain into his sea of

consciousness, causing him to suffer extreme pain.

The front part of the umbrella rotated at high speed without stopping, just like the corkscrew propellers created by the people of the great western continent for big boats. It dragged him forwards at high speeds. The dark, icy cold lake water constantly rammed against his body, bringing even more pain. Just how long did he have to be dragged for? Where did the Yellow Paper Umbrella want to take him?

Suddenly, he realized the lake water had disappeared, and at the same time, he heard many sounds.

They were the sounds of bursting through the lake water, and the sounds of the bugs within the grass beside the lake. Just why did that clear yet slightly violent cry sound so close to his ear, when it should have been very far away?

Was the dark image in front of his eyes really the bottom of the lake? No, it was the night sky, and it was dark because there were no stars in the Garden of Zhou.

It was a small lake ten or so li away from Sunset Valley.

That night, the small lake had seen the battle of incessant blood and flames on the peak. It had heard the cry of a phoenix, it had been illuminated by wings of fire, and at this moment, it had also heard the cry of a peacock. Just when it had experienced peace, it was destroyed again.

The Yellow Paper Umbrella rotated, and brought Chen Changsheng out of the lake.

Lake water fell off the umbrella and his body, flying in all directions. It created a falling curtain of water.

Chen Changsheng became clear-headed, and understood that he had finally escaped from the cold and scary lake water. He had returned to the world above the lake, however, he just did not know whether he was still in the Garden of Zhou, or the other side of the cold lake.

In the next moment, he discovered that he had arrived in the night sky. The small lake below his feet had become a mirror, and he was several dozen zhang above the ground.

Any person, to go from the depths of the lake to high up in the night sky so suddenly, would feel slightly astonished and absent-minded.

At that moment, the lake water split open once again, and a pair of wings of light transformed into flowing radiance. It chased from below him. The tips of the wings were brought together, forming a sharp spike and heavily striking his body.

A muffled sound.

Chen Changsheng's blood surged, and he almost spat out some blood. He forcefully swallowed it back down, but that did not

mean he was not injured.

After being decisively hit again, he who was already heavily injured was no longer able to last anymore.

Holding onto the Yellow Paper Umbrella, he was just like a kite with a broken string, flying higher into the night sky dispiritedly.

To continue flying to the highest point before falling onto the ground again—would that be the time of death?

Thinking about these matters, he fainted once again. In the final moment before he fainted, he suddenly felt the night sky grow slightly lighter.

That was not the feeling of impending death, but rather the night sky had really been illuminated.

What illuminated the night sky was a pair of flaming wings.

Not the light wings behind the two girls that chased him, but... a pair of flame wings.

The flame wings opened up comfortably in the night sky. They were very large, and gave off warm yet holy flames.

As a result, the girl in the wings seemed somewhat delicate.

The flame wings rushed through the night sky, and just at the moment where Chen Changsheng was about to fall to his death, she grabbed him before continuing to fly towards the far away distance.

The two girls that had chased Chen Changsheng until now felt an extremely strong feeling of dread for some reason. The wings of light rapidly flapped, dodging backwards. Afterwards they thought of the peacock cry they had heard in the lake before, and the dread within their hearts intensified. Without even thinking, they flew hurriedly towards the area where the cry originated from with unbelievable speed which almost seemed to be a method of burning their lives.

Nanke jumped off the cliff, and fell faster and faster just like a rock. The whistling wind blew at her hair, however, it was unable to blow away the indifference in her eyes. Concerning the approaching ground and death, it did not hold any meaning to her, because she could see very clearly that her two female servants had already arrived in front of the Sunset Valley peak, under the cliff, and were waiting.

Without a sound at all, the two females caught Nanke's petite body, and then immediately transformed into a ball of light. The ball of light then opened up into wings of light, like clouds in the blue sky. The wings of light suddenly changed slightly in color as compared to when they chased after Chen Changsheng. The edges of the wings carried a smear of bewitching green, as if an ethereal body had transformed into a real object.

The green wings on Nanke's back moved slowly. She gazed at a

distance in the night sky with an indifferent expression. After confirming the location of the wings of fire that had already turned into a spot of light, she began fluttering her wings without hesitation, chasing in that direction. The green wings of several zhang in length created two whirlwinds in front of the cliff, and with a terrifying whistle of piercing through the air, she disappeared.

The innate blood talent of humans or demons seemed somewhat similar to the transformations of demi-humans. However, the difference was actually very big. The awakening of innate talent normally had four stages. The initial awakening was the blood itself, and the second awakening was the spirit. In simpler words, after this awakening, the cultivator and her blood would combine into one body, no longer differentiating between the two. This was also truly understanding what they were.

After two days and two nights without rest, being unable to defeat Nanke and the zither-playing old man working together in the end, peacefully walking into the abyss of despair, and before the great dread of death, Xu Yourong successfully completed her second awakening. The phoenix spirit deep within her body also awakened like this. Her blood and her body combined and merged, and through use of spiritual sense, a pair of wings of fire unfurled in the night sky.

However, this did not mean that she suddenly gained the power to burn the whole world. At that moment, she was still heavily injured, and Nanke's poisonous blood was still constantly wreaking havoc in her body. This caused her vision to become slightly blurry, so she did not fly back to the peak to fight a life and death battle with Nanke again. Instead, she flew into the far away

distance in the night sky, as she needed treatment and grooming the most right now.

However, she did not think that after only leaving Sunset Valley for several moments she would actually encounter another battle in the peaceful-looking small lake around ten li away. She knew with a single glance that the two girls who were linked together, that had burst out of the water with wings on light on their backs were Nanke's two fearsome maids. But who were they chasing?

Chapter 281 - Flying Wing To Wing

No matter who it was—in that brief moment she had been unable to clearly make out the other person's appearance—it was definitely one of the human cultivators that had entered the Garden of Zhou. This was enough of a reason. It was enough for Xu Yourong who was flying around Sunset Valley to unsparingly use up her true essence once more to adjust her direction and fly over to that heavily injured and unconscious human cultivator's side. At that critical point where it seemed like she would dash herself to death against the ground, she grabbed the cultivator and flew off into the distance.

She had no experience in flying with wings, but she had a lot of experience riding the white crane as it soared through the blue sky. As she soared through the night sky, she had none of that imagined unease or terror. But she was just a beginner after all, so it was hard to avoid some improficiency and awkwardness. This was especially the case when considering that she was already heavily wounded and very weak, and that she was now carrying an extra person. It was hard to avoid swaying a bit, giving the appearance that she was drunk.

It was not too long before Nanke had caught up, only several li behind. Separated by such a distance, she could even feel the killing intent coming from her. She did not turn around, instead focused on learning how to fly. Her wings of fire began to sway less, her posture grew more stable, and her speed began to quicken. Gradually she began to turn into a streak of fire blazing through the night sky.

After the awakening of the phoenix soul, she had comprehended

many principles, and gained use of much of her innate ability. Solely in terms of speed, she was without a doubt the fastest on the continent. Whether it was the Red Falcons used by the Great Zhou army or the Great Western Continent's Heavenly Messenger Birds, whether it was Nanke or the swift Silver Dragons; none of them could surpass her speed.

The problem was that she was severely wounded. An even larger problem was that she was currently carrying a person. The person was unconscious, and weighed her down like a wet bag of flour. If she dropped this person, even Nanke would find it very hard to catch up to her. She could go back to the gardens where the rest of the human cultivators had congregated and develop a counterattack against the demon plot. She could also temporarily escape, treat her wounds and the poison in her body, then return to battle Nanke, and this time she believed she would definitely obtain victory.

But she could not do so, so there was no 'if'.

This entire time, she had not glanced at the person in her hands—she made no distinction of identity, because no matter what, she could not throw them away. It was just like Nanke had said at the peak of Sunset Valley. From beginning to end, she was an existence burdened with the word 'responsibility'. Many choices had already become a sort of instinct for her. She did not need to ponder them or weigh the pros and cons, she only needed to carry them out.

Two streams of light skimmed over the forests and wetland at the edge of the plain, their colors only slightly different. Wherever they passed, bits of grass were sent flying and leaves were shocked

into puffs of green.

She had never been able to pull away from Nanke and her vision was starting to go fuzzy. This was a sign that the peacock's poison was beginning to erode her sea of consciousness. She had always been using the Heavenly Phoenix's true blood to suppress it, but over the course of this chase, that blood was gradually being boiled away and was no longer able to suppress the poison. Perhaps she could ignite all the Heavenly Phoenix true blood to go even faster, but then what would she do about the poison?

Nanke's figure grew closer and closer and the darkness of the surrounding plain was newly dyed with green. There was no time to think, but in truth, she didn't even think before she made her decision. At this moment, she finally lowered her head to glance at the person in her hands. She helplessly thought to herself, everyone here cultivates the Dao, paying attention to dining with the pure wind and eating the starlight, but just what are you eating every day that you're so heavy?

Then she ignited the meager remnants of the true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix in her body.

With a boom, the surrounding plains began to burn, and glimmers of light from water could be vaguely seen under the grass.

Xu Yourong turned into a streak of fire, and disappeared into the sky.

After a while, Nanke arrived at this place and paused. She stared off into the distance at that streak of fire, her expression cold, thinking about something.

Her green peacock wings slowly flapped, spreading coldness all around. The burning grasses and reeds were gradually extinguished, leaving behind only scorched earth.

The speed obtained from burning the true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix was so fast that even she could not catch up.

"A woman's softheartedness, failing to see the big picture, lacking a noble spirit."

Nanke's evaluation of Xu Yourong was cold and disdainful. "Even if you can continue to live, how can you continue to be my rival?"

She understood very clearly that in this sort of situation, even if the Heavenly Phoenix soul within Xu Yourong's body had awakened, it would still be very difficult for her to survive.

The green wings slowly retracted, and the light subtly changed. Those two women appeared on both sides of her and knelt down onto the ground. Their voices trembling, they said, "These lowly servants pay respects to the master. These lowly servants are incompetent!"

Nanke paid no attention to her two maids, not even glancing at their faces pale from fear. She pensively asked, "That person... was

Chen Changsheng?"

The two maids hurriedly narrated the events that had occurred on the other side. For the first time, a smile appeared on Nanke's face, but it was still a very cold smile. "So originally it wasn't a woman's softheartedness, nor was it failing to grasp the big picture. Instead it was chaos arising from too many problems... for the two of you to die together would be rather interesting."

The wind that blew against her face was originally cold, but because of the boiling and burning of her blood, it became a warm wind. Xu Yourong wanted to go to the Mountainside Whispering Wood, but her Heavenly Phoenix true blood was almost exhausted and she could not hold on for much longer. She glanced behind her to confirm that Nanke had not caught up, then turned towards the northeast and flew for several li before landing.

She had always followed the edge of the Plains of the Unsetting Sun as she flew. Her reason was very simple, and Nanke was also very clear on it. It was only by this that from the very start, she had been able to persist for so long. When she finally landed, it was also naturally at the edge of the plains. It was a giant stretch of wetland, with reeds growing as far as the eye could see.

The reeds were like a small isle, the surrounding reeds so high that they hid it away from any outside gazes. It was like a little world sectioned off from the rest.

There were no stars in the night sky of the Garden of Zhou. The light reflecting from the water between the reeds came from those wings of fire. They were like innumerable mirrors, creating a

beautiful scene.

With a thought from Xu Yourong, the golden flames slowly faded. The two wings had originally been a pure snowy white.

Her brows slightly creased together; she appeared to be in pain. Deep within the clear and limpid water of her eyes, a discomfoting green could faintly be seen. Around that green was a golden spark that was incessantly burning, but it was a very dim flame. At any time, it could go out. Then she turned once more to that human cultivator that she had saved.

For some reason, she felt that this person was somewhat familiar, although her vision was rather fuzzy. She could not even make out the person's features, only faintly tell that his face was very pale. For some reason, even though the person was unconscious, he still gave her a calm and amiable impression.

Because of this impression, she stared blankly at him.

Then she was struck by exhaustion.

She sat down cross-legged and then closed her eyes to stabilize her breathing. A pure white wing slowly drew back, then like the warm quilts in the Divine General's mansion, wrapped around her body.

The wings were a pair.

The other pure white wing slowly fell down, gently covering Chen Changsheng.

Chapter 282 - Even If They Met, They Would Not Recognize Each Other

It was late at night, and the indistinct disk of light in the plains still hung over the horizon, giving even the reeds at the edge of the plains a little light. Xu Yourong opened her eyes as she awoke. The crystals in her hands had already become useless powder and the true essence in her body had recovered somewhat. However, it was only enough to suppress the poison in her blood, and could not be used to solve any of her other problems.

With a thought, she retracted her pure white wings. Only when her fingers brushed up against something did she remember that she had rescued a human cultivator.

Her finger rested against that human cultivator's vein, then after a moment, she slightly raised her brow. She seemed rather surprised—this human cultivator did not have that much true essence, and it was not a result of any sort of battle. There was something wrong with the meridians themselves. To be born with such a defect and yet still enter Ethereal Opening and thus obtain the qualifications to enter the Garden of Zhou; one could infer from this just how diligently he inevitably would have had to cultivate.

It was a pity that this person's luck was simply too disastrous. The Garden of Zhou was so vast, and yet he somehow managed to encounter Nanke's two wings. His body was heavily injured, and if he did not receive treatment soon, he would definitely die. The other reason this person's luck was just too disastrous had to do with her current situation. Currently, her true essence was almost

completely exhausted and she had lost a lot of blood. It was simply impossible for her to use the Sacred Light technique to treat his wounds.

She stood up and looked towards the depths of those plains as she shook her head, then she turned around and began walking in the opposite direction. Across the pond of reeds, not too far away, was dry land. A little further past that was a forest, and past the forest, she could faintly see a cliff. If she followed that cliff, she would probably arrive at one of the gardens that the human cultivators were gathered in. She even remembered that this particular cliff had many caves.

She silently gazed at the dense forest and cliff through the weeds. Yes, she only remembered, but she could not see it clearly. Right now, her vision was still blurry.

She had thought that the person's situation to be dire, but her situation was even more disastrous. In order to escape from Nanke with that person in tow, she had ignited far too much of her Heavenly Phoenix true blood, and now the poison in her blood had begun to spread. Her vision, as well as the rest of her five senses, had all received serious damage. If she could not promptly make her way out of the Garden of Zhou, she really would die here.

At the summit of Sunset Valley, the phoenix soul had awakened, but so what? Without a fleshly body to inhabit, what did it matter how strong the soul was? Without a lamp wick for the flame, could the flame exist? Would she really die here?

A gentle breeze blew from the plains. As it blew across the water

beneath the reeds and weeds, its temperature lowered, and it felt slightly chilly. Her expression remained serene, but the hands that hung over the edge of her skirt began to tremble, as if they wanted to grasp the wind but could not. As she calmly gazed at the mountains of the Garden of Zhou, slowly... ever so slowly... for some reason, she became angry.

Yesterday when she had taken her final leave from the Mountainside Whispering Wood, she had gone to where the senior from Holy Maiden Peak was and learned that Chen Changsheng and the wolf youth had quietly departed. It seemed they had gone upstream of that river. As the next Holy Maiden of the south, she was privy to many secrets. Although she did not know it exactly, she knew that the entrance to the Sword Pool was some place upstream of that river.

Chen Changsheng's original destination had been the Sword Pool.

The upper reaches of the river were separated from this patch of reeds and from the peak of Sunset Valley by several hundred li. Separated by such a vast distance, even if Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu could fly, they still would not have been able to rush over here.

This was why she was angry.

She had never concealed her thoughts on Chen Changsheng, and she had never much liked the fiancé that she had never laid eyes on. However, she and that person had a marriage contract between them after all, so she naturally had some conjectures, and even

hopes.

Only with hope can there be disappointment.

As she looked at the mountains of the Garden of Zhou, gazing in the direction of the upper reaches of that river, she developed an ineffable fury towards that fellow. "He doesn't have the slightest grasp of the bigger picture, only knowing how to treat injuries and save lives. Could it be that he didn't see that this was all part of the demons' plan? His actions are so extremely small-minded that it really makes one angry."

The chaos within the Garden of Zhou definitely had something to do with the demons. It was only because she had reached this conclusion that she had walked that lonesome mountain path on Sunset Valley. If Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had reached the same conclusion and they had pooled their strength, then together with Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian, those two members of the Divine State's Seven Laws, they would have definitely been able to break through the demons' plans.

But Chen Changsheng had gone to find the Sword Pool, so she had given such an evaluation.

She could not have thought that at the peak of Sunset Valley, Nanke had given a similar evaluation of her.

"As expected, Shuang'er wasn't wrong. Normally he'll appear honest and considerate, kind and benevolent, but when push comes to shove, you can see the cold selfishness within. At this

time, he still regards the Sword Pool as more important than anything else. Only... why was it that he was like me, rushing around the Garden of Zhou for two nights doing his utmost to save others?"

Xu Yourong creased her brows in thought, then finally came to an answer—Chen Changsheng had done it on purpose and saved all those people for her to see.

"Did he use this method so that... I would get a good impression of him? Truly a hypocritical scoundrel."

Her mood was a little strange, so she no longer thought about it. Turning, she went to look at the cultivator that she had rescued. Because her vision was still blurry, she lowered her head and moved very close to get a clearer view of that person's appearance. His unconscious appearance, with his brows creased tightly together, still gave a honest and calm impression, like one would want to get to know him. His age was around twenty years old.

"He seems like a sincere person. For him to be at Ethereal Opening at his age, perhaps he's some heavily favored core disciple of some sect, or perhaps he was on one of the Three Banners of this year's Grand Examination. It's a pity that he's going end up a corpse in this wilderness."

She had confirmed that she could do nothing to save him, so she could not help but feel a little regret. She shook her head in pity, then reached out her hand and began to search his body, looking for something that could prove his identity. Unexpectedly, she found nothing except a very ordinary dagger, whose surface bore

no mark or insignia.

She remembered that when she rescued him last night, there had been a strange weapon in his hands, possessing the shape of an umbrella, but now she could not find it. She wrinkled her brow, then perhaps because she thought of something, she turned around and began to make her way to the dry land across the pond of reeds. The water soaked her skirt, causing her to leave marks on the beach at the edge of the forest.

In the very instant Xu Yourong's figure disappeared into the trees, a thin black silhouette fell like lightning on that patch of reeds.

The reeds swayed with the wind. A strand of Qi suddenly appeared then just as quickly vanished. A little girl wearing a black dress appeared by Chen Changsheng's side. At her waist was a jade ruyi.

The little girl had a cold expression, and her vertical pupils were as black as her dress. All this made that red birthmark between her eyebrows seem all the gaudier.

She was the Black Dragon. Chen Changsheng called her Zhizhi, or sometimes he would call her Hongzhuang.

As she stared at the unconscious Chen Changsheng, the slightest trace of concern and confusion appeared in her cold expression. "Weren't you on the other side of the cliff? How did you suddenly end up here?"

As a noble and powerful Black Frost Dragon, even though she was but a strand of a soul, it only took her a glance to see that Chen Changsheng's insides were riddled with injuries.

If no-one came to save him, he would most certainly die.

"How did you end up together with that woman?"

She gazed at the forest across the reeds, and her brows rose up in displeasure, as she thought to herself, "Chen Changsheng, you idiot! Just what did she promise you? How could you trust a human female?"

For her, the human that had left her the most bitter memories, besides the long-gone Wang Zhice, was that woman, the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Xu Yourong was very much like a young Tianhai Divine Empress. Taken together with that engagement that Chen Changsheng had talked about, it meant that she had an innate wariness of Xu Yourong. She did not have a single good impression of her.

She saw Xu Yourong save Chen Changsheng, then spent a very long time searching for the two. When she finally found them, she unexpectedly saw Xu Yourong leave once more.

This only increased the enmity she had towards Xu Yourong.

In her view, the reason why Xu Yourong had risked such danger to rescue Chen Changsheng last night was because the demons were watching. Now when Xu Yourong left Chen Changsheng to die, it was because there was no one there to see. The reason for all this was because Xu Yourong highly valued her reputation, viewing it as even more important than the lives of others, and even her own life as well.

This sort of woman was truly very cruel, hypocritical, and frightening.

She thought about the letter that Chen Changsheng had once described to her in the underground cave, she thought about those words written in the letter, and an expression of loathing appeared on her face.

To leave Chen Changsheng in these reeds as you walk off, letting him helplessly and slowly wait for his death, is that what you meant in your letter with 'do your best'?

Besides Chen Changsheng, she did not have any good impression about humans, so right now she was very angry. Moreover, she had invested a lot of blood into Chen Changsheng, true blood. She could not permit Chen Changsheng to die like this, or else that blood would go to waste. Then her first priority was to find a way for Chen Changsheng to survive.

How could she heal the wounds in Chen Changsheng's body?

She thought of a method, then an indescribable mixture of shame

and rage appeared between her eyebrows, causing that red birthmark to seemingly glow.

"Remember, you owe me yet another life," she said angrily to the unconscious Chen Changsheng.

With these words, she bent over and embraced Chen Changsheng, then nestled into his bosom. Then she turned into a black light and entered into his body.

A strand of extremely cold and extremely pure Qi emerged from Chen Changsheng's stomach, then it gradually returned into his body.

Chen Changsheng's internal organs were covered with a host of fine cuts, each one bleeding incessantly. That cold Qi caused the blood to stagnate and the flow to gradually cease. Simultaneously, both his pulse and his breathing also began to slow.

The water between the reeds became covered with a thin layer of frost.

Chen Changsheng's brow also began to develop a layer of frost.

At the same time, a jade ruyi appeared on his wrist.

After a while, there came the sound of water splashing about.

Xu Yourong walked out of the forest, carrying her skirt as she returned to that patch of reeds. What she had gone to do was a complete mystery.

Seeing the layer of frost over Chen Changsheng's brow and sensing that the surroundings were a little colder than they had been before, she slightly raised her brow, thinking that something had happened while she was gone.

But there was clearly nothing around this patch of reeds.

She took out her Fated Star Plate, her fingers seemingly inadvertently moving across it a few times.

The Fated Star Plate gave no indications. Those lines were extremely disorderly, in complete chaos. Just like how there were no stars in the night sky above the Garden of Zhou, she could not see a single thing in this plate.

Her injuries were too heavy, making it impossible to walk back to those gardens where the human cultivators had gathered. Then what should she do next?

She stretched out her hand and grabbed Chen Changsheng's belt, then began walking towards that cliff while carrying Chen Changsheng like he was a bundle.

Because she was not that tall, Chen Changsheng's face would occasionally dip into the water, causing a splash and waking up a

few fish.

Just what did this person eat every day? He doesn't look fat, so why is he so heavy?

So she thought.

Chapter 283 - Dirty Face, Frosty Hair

The slightly warm dawn light illuminated the water at the edge of the plains, giving it a dull luster. Nanke stood at the edge of the water, her indifferent gaze looking forward. She lifted up her right hand, bringing fresh water to her mouth to help the medicine go down. Her two maids attended to her, handing her a wet towel with which to wash her face. After a while, she felt her spirit had somewhat recovered, and lightly waved her hand in the air in front of her.

Although there was nothing but wetland around them, the Garden of Zhou did not have many mosquitoes. Her actions were not to shoo something away, but rather to produce a black curtain. On this black curtain was a rough map of the Garden of Zhou, as well as several flickering points of light. Those lights were the life lamps that had been lit by Black Robe, indicating the positions of their targets.

Two of those life lamps were in the plains. At times, they would be in the east, then they would be in the west, suddenly teleporting dozens of li. It was like there was some powerful interfering force that prevented their exact locations from being found. Those two lights should be Zhexiu and Qi Jian. They were already deep within the plains, so if all went as expected, they had no possibility of survival, so Nanke was not worried. Her gaze was more focused on the other two life lamps.

Those two life lamps were Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng. On that black curtain, their two points of light were exceptionally eye-catching. They were very far away from those several gardens that the human cultivators had gathered in, and in addition, they

had not moved for a very long time. This seemed to indicate that the pair already had no more strength to run. It seemed that the task which Black Robe had assigned to her would soon be complete.

At some point, the zither-playing old man had come down from the summit of Sunset Valley and met up with Nanke and her two maids. As he looked at those life lamps on the black curtain, he was not as confident and easy-going as Nanke. With concern in his voice, he said, "Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng are both heavily injured, so they shouldn't be able to make it back to those gardens, but...there are still some human cultivators that have concealed themselves in the mountains of the Garden of Zhou for all this time, and most of those human cultivators are at the peak of Ethereal Opening. What will we do if Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng manage to meet those human cultivators while they're escaping?"

The plan that Black Robe had personally formulated made full use of the Garden of Zhou's special conditions and geography. He was exceedingly thorough in his understanding of the human cultivators' greed for wealth and merit, and his grasp over the human psyche was perfect. All this meant that it was sufficient for him to sneak only a few demon experts into the Garden of Zhou to throw the entire garden into chaos. If it were not for Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng, then perhaps the Garden of Zhou would have already turned into a slaughterhouse. The problem was that the human cultivators had now caught on to the demons' plan and the vast majority of them had gathered together. In a head-on battle, regardless of how powerful the demon experts were, they still would not be able to stand up to several hundred human cultivators.

Nanke's expression was still as cold as ever. Not bothering to explain, she only said, "In their situation, if Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng really did meet up with some other human expert, they might even die a bit sooner."

The water that was being splashed around as Xu Yourong made her way from that patch of reeds to the cliff gradually calmed down, then became covered with a thin layer of ice.

Chen Changsheng's body was soaked by the water, all of which quickly froze into ice. His eyebrows and the hair at his temples were dyed with snow, as if his hair had grown gray ahead of time. He was already very mature for his age, but now seemed to have grown even more so.

Xu Yourong naturally noticed the peculiarities of his body and slightly raised her brows. She once again took his pulse. She sensed that while the person's true essence was still as lacking as ever, the wounds on his internal organs had stabilized. It was just that his pulse and breathing were much slower than a normal person's, and she didn't know whether this was because of this person's cultivation method or if it was an omen of death.

Her vision was still blurred from the poison, so she could only faintly make out that this person's face was covered with a layer of frost, making him seem rather mature. After a moment of silence, she suddenly stretched out her hand and rubbed the ice off his face, then she just stared, not understanding why she had just done what she did.

Walking into the forest that was bathed in morning light, she

noiselessly walked over those soft and tender fallen leaves. After advancing dozens of zhang, she stopped and gazed at the distant cliff in front of her.

The people of the past had once treaded a path through this forest, and even though it was now covered by the leaves, its traces were still faintly discernible. It continued forward, then began to curve its way up the cliff, making a 'Z' shape.

She carefully placed Chen Changsheng down on the leaves, then took out the Tong Bow, pulling the bowstring out in a semicircle and silently aiming it at some place.

The morning wind accompanied the morning light into the forest, but while the morning light was blocked by the tree leaves, making the forest dark and quiet, the morning wind was not sliced into pieces by the tree branches. The gentle wind caressed the hair at the side of her face, which would occasionally brush lightly against the bowstring and yet not make a sound. It was like the gentlest finger lightly pressing down on the bowstring, ready in the next moment to explode with a powerful music.

A leaf was blown off its branch by the wind. It slowly descended through that blurry world in front her eyes, eventually resting directly in front of her feet.

Her longbow did not move, her eyes did not blink, her expression was calm and focused. She only stared at the cliff, at that place devoid of any human life.

Just as that leaf rested in front of her foot, an elderly voice sounded out from the cliff. "Are you a friend?"

Along with this voice, a hand appeared, and around that hand's wrist was a gray string. The hand held a wooden plaque, upon which an extremely complex sect insignia was drawn in vermillion red. The insignia was drawn with some sort of strange paint. Even from such a distance, she could clearly feel the dry heat coming off of it.

All the human cultivators that entered the Garden of Zhou would possess the gray string. The sect insignia on the wooden plaque was evidence of identity. It was only a simple action, but it contained many meanings and did as much as possible to avoid any unnecessary misunderstandings. From this detail, one could tell that the owner of this elderly voice was exceedingly cautious.

Xu Yourong could barely make out a blurry image and could not see any details, but the calm expression on her face certainly did not show it. She felt an intense vigilance from that voice, then she thought of the usual practice of the Garden of Zhou and the bloody battles that would usually take place. She remembered that her clothes were stained with blood, and decided that it was easy for there to be a misunderstanding, so she said, "Not an enemy."

At their first meeting, they naturally could not be friends, but that did not mean they were enemies; this was the reasoning for her choice of words.

After a moment, a man walked out from the direction of the cliff. With his white hair and elderly face, he must have been at least a

hundred years old. While both his expression and pace seemed to be calm, it was not sufficient to hide his wariness. Although he had walked out, the right hand hanging by his waist held a magical artifact, ready at any time to take action, and he maintained what he considered a safe distance between himself and Xu Yourong.

The distance had been very carefully chosen so that it would make both him and her feel safe. If he was not a senior who had experienced many years of tribulations in cultivation, he would have definitely not displayed such an exquisite sense of propriety.

Xu Yourong felt the aura that the man took no effort to conceal, and yet was not purposely emitting. From this aura, she could confirm that this old man was a peak level Ethereal Opening expert. Her mind grew tense, but the expression on her face relaxed.

She let go of the bowstring and gripped the longbow as she said, "May I ask Senior for his distinguished name?"

The rules of the Garden of Zhou had always been bloody and violent, and moreover, the cultivators who were not in the three gardens and remained concealed in the mountains were often experts. They were more inclined towards the treasures and legacies of the Garden of Zhou. To meet with this sort of person, perhaps there might be a fierce battle. It was even highly probable that the person did not know of the demons' presence in the Garden of Zhou!

So she very calmly and directly continued. "Demons have infiltrated the Garden of Zhou. We were injured when they

ambushed us."

This was still an explanation, but this explanation had an additional meaning. The demons that infiltrated the Garden of Zhou were inevitably strong, but they needed an ambush to inflict injuries on her, so this meant that she was also strong.

Whether or not that old man had come to the conclusion she had wanted him to come to from her seemingly careless explanation was a mystery, because it was very obvious that this old man was just as she had guessed. From the time he had entered the Garden of Zhou, he had hidden himself away in places that were rarely visited, purposely avoiding contact with other cultivators. Up to this point, he did not know that demons had entered the Garden of Zhou, so upon hearing her words, he was very shocked.

"How did demons get into the Garden of Zhou?"

The old man was very surprised, but he did not show any fear. As he looked at the gray string on his wrist, he sneered, "No wonder so many strange things have been happening."

It was very obvious that he had already found the treasure he had been looking for on his treasure hunt, and so had attempted to light the gray string and depart, only to be met with failure.

Xu Yourong did not explain, because the plan of the demons was too complicated, and there was no need to.

The old man turned his gaze to Chen Changsheng on the fallen leaves behind her, his entire body covered with frost, and asked with some astonishment, "Is this person your companion?"

Xu Yourong shook her head. "I don't recognize him. I just happened to see him being attacked by the demon experts and luckily rescued him."

"At such a time, to still remember to save others. Little girl, you're not bad."

The old man looked upon her with admiration, then said, "Anyways, where did you two intend to go?"

Xu Yourong replied, "The human cultivators are currently gathered at three gardens. I originally intended to take this fellow daoist there, but because my injuries are too heavy, I can't go very fast. It would take me at least half a day to get there, and I worry that the demons will catch up. I didn't imagine that I would meet up with Senior. I would trouble Senior to let other fellow daoists know and have them come over to rescue us."

The old man evidenced his disapproval on his face and declared, "As a fellow cultivator, I will send you there. How can I leave you here to face such risks?"

Xu Yourong replied, "The demon experts that infiltrated the Garden of Zhou are very strong. With Senior protecting the two of us, I'm afraid.. ."

These words had endless meanings, but it had a good intention.

The old man smiled. "If this was outside the Garden of Zhou, then I really might have to be careful, but within the Garden of Zhou, I don't think those demon experts will be as strong as you think they are."

His smile was very free, his expression calm and easy-going. His eyes were warm and bright, and as he said those words, he seemed extremely confident.

Within the Garden of Zhou, a peak level Ethereal Opening expert should be an existence without rival, so this old man's self-confidence had a basis.

For some reason, Xu Yourong did not tell the old man that the demon experts that had entered the Garden of Zhou were even more frightening than the average peak level Ethereal Opening cultivator—nor of the terrifying presence of Nanke.

She looked at him with curiosity and admiration, asking him, "May I ask who Senior is?"

The old man replied, "My last name is Bai, my first name is Hai. I've cultivated within the Setting Sun Sect for more than two hundred years. It's not very often that I leave the sect, so you most likely have not heard of me."

Xu Yourong seemed somewhat at a loss, as if she was rather

perplexed by this name.

In truth, she felt somewhat cold.

Chapter 284 - I Want Your...

The Setting Sun Sect was a very special sect on the continent. It was not part of the Orthodoxy's north or south, because this sect's method of cultivation did not use purification by starlight as its foundation, but drew its power from earthfire. The sect was located in the remote southwest by a volcano, and the cultivators of this sect rarely showed themselves to the world. Who would have thought that in this year's opening of the Garden of Zhou, one of their cultivators had actually come?

If it were an average cultivator, then it would have been just like that old man said—she would not have even heard the name of the Setting Sun Sect before. But she was no ordinary cultivator. As the next Holy Maiden of the south, even though she had been born in the capital, she had still later gone on to the South Stream Temple. There, besides cultivating and reading the Heavenly Tomes, she also had to learn about the various sects of the continent, so she knew about the Setting Sun Sect.

She even knew about this old man called Bai Hai. He was an elder of the Setting Sun Sect and possessed a violent and powerful strength. His temperament... cruel and bloodthirsty.

"So...Senior is part of the Setting Sun Sect."

She paused in the middle, making her seem like an ordinary disciple that did not know of the Setting Sun Sect, and so repeated it out of respect.

Bai Hai, this elder from the Setting Sun Sect, asked her with considerable interest, "What sect are you a disciple of?"

Xu Yourong clasped her hands in respect and solemnly replied, "This Junior is an elf and is not part of any sect."

Bai Hai seemed a little surprised, as if he did not expect this young lady to be an elf. Then he said, "Let's go."

With these words, he began to walk towards Xu Yourong. It was very natural, as if he was prepared to help Xu Yourong by taking up Chen Changsheng from his place amongst the fallen leaves.

"Very well, Senior."

With those words, Xu Yourong lifted Chen Changsheng up from the leaves and began walking towards the elder. It was also very natural, as if she were a cute girl following the orders of her senior.

Neither she nor Bai Hai noticed that Chen Changsheng's eyelids were trembling, as if he was about to wake up. But in the end, he did not wake up.

The leaves rustled beneath their shoes. With each rustle, the distance between them shrank.

Bai Hai suddenly stopped and casually said, "You've suffered such heavy injuries. Why don't you give that fellow daoist to me?"

Xu Yourong calmly replied, "Many thanks to Senior for his lofty righteousness. My injuries are not too severe, and still bearable, so your assistance is not needed."

At this moment, the two were still separated by a bit more than a dozen zhang.

But neither of them took another step forward.

The rustling of the leaves ceased, and the forest returned its former serenity. One could even call it a deathly stillness.

After a very long time, a sigh resounded through the forest.

His face filled with regret, Bai Hai sighed, "Even now, you haven't showed any gaps. Truly perfect."

Xu Yourong calmly replied, "The same for you."

It was obvious that she no longer called that man a senior, and that she had dropped any pretense of formality.

Bai Hai slightly raised his brows and said with some confusion, "When we were separated by more than a hundred zhang, my lady could have released her bow and shot at me, so why did my lady choose not to do so? Don't say that my lady had not yet seen through me then."

He very naturally no longer referred to himself as a senior, and his language had become one of respect.

Xu Yourong did not explain, because she did not want to reveal to her opponent that her true essence was exhausted, and so she could not ensure that the Wu Arrows could fly so far a distance to kill a peak level Ethereal Opening expert.

If they were a little bit closer, just like now, except if her opponent took just one more step forward, then she would attempt to shoot her opponent to death. It was a pity that her opponent did not do so.

So her mood at this moment was also full of regret.

Bai Hai asked, "My lady had already seen through my intentions?"

Xu Yourong calmly said nothing, thus tacitly admitting it.

Bai Hai asked, "But how? I thought my acting was rather good."

Xu Yourong's answer was very simple. "Feeling."

Bai Hai ruefully sighed, "I suppose this is what they call talent."

With these words, he slapped his palm at the air in front of Xu

Yourong.

A dark flame appeared at the edge of his palm.

As the energy from his palm shot forward, one palm became dozens of palms, surrounding Xu Yourong from all sides.

The sky above the forest grew dark red.

Those dark flames seemed heavier than normal flames, as if they possessed their own substance. It was like the dark but incomparably hot magma that flowed under the earth.

The tender leaves on the branches suddenly curled up and the bark began to crack as the temperature suddenly increased.

In the next moment, those dark red flames would completely engulf Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng.

As Bai Hai made his move, Xu Yourong's right foot lightly pressed against the ground. With a light crunch, the fallen leaves around her and Chen Changsheng were suddenly jolted upwards, dancing about in the air.

The fallen leaves were incapable of obstructing those innumerable palms imbued with dark flames. With a boom, they were instantly set aflame, creating a sea of fire.

It was exactly this sea of flames that obstructed Bai Hai's line of sight as well as the killing intent concealed in his innumerable palms.

This was to fight fire with fire.

Under the cover of the berserk flames of the sea of fire, Xu Yourong lifted Chen Changsheng up and turned into an after-image. In a flash, she arrived at the cliff outside the forest.

This was the one place Bai Hai's flame palms could not block, and it was also a place that she had already taken note of. If the cliff was solid, she naturally could not enter it, but this part of the cliff had a cave.

Before this sinister dialogue had even begun, she had already noticed the cave and made her plans. If she could not seize the decisive moment in the battle, she had already prepared for herself a path of retreat.

This cave was her path of retreat, but it was not an escape.

Bai Hai pierced through that chaotic sea of fire, and with a grave expression, attacked once more.

Those innumerable palm images carrying those dark flames suddenly combined themselves into a perfectly straight lance of fire, which rumbled towards Xu Yourong's back. This Setting Sun Sect elder knew what sort of person this young lady that he wanted

to kill was, so he did not dare to spare any effort, nor did he leave himself any path of retreat. When he attacked, he used his most powerful Setting Sun Palm and expressed the sum of his entire life of cultivation.

Xu Yourong turned around and saw that lance of fire which contained a terrifying power, but her expression was as serene as ever. With a flip of her wrist, she thrust the Tong Bow into the ground.

The surface of the cave was very sturdy. With a crack, inch by inch, the ground gave way. The Tong Bow was thrust deep into the earth, and yet it was still taller than her.

In a flash, countless branches rose out of the Tong Bow, and numerous leaves sprouted from those branches. In that space warped by the heat of that lance of fire, it seemed a little ostentatious. It brought a very fresh and clean odor that permeated the entire cave entrance.

The course of events was very hard to describe with words.

A long stretch of time was compressed into these few moments.

For a hundred-year-old tree, how many years would it take to construct it into a palace?

This was the growth of a lonely wutong tree, and it was also the construction of a palace.

The Tong Bow had become a wutong tree, and it also had become a Tong Palace. Yes, this was the Great Zhou Imperial Palace's Tong Palace, the palace that had served as Chen Changsheng's jail for one day and one night.

The Wutong, as the unique and unmatched pair of divine artifacts on the Tier of Legendary Weapons, had also possessed this sort of wondrous use. The previous Holy Maiden of the South Stream Temple had actually attached the Tong Palace to the Tong Bow.

The Tong Palace was an array of sorts. For imprisoning enemies, it was extremely powerful. For protecting others, it was incomparably tenacious.

There was a boom. This was the sound made as fire rapidly expanded, as well as the sound made as the wave of fire dashed itself against a stone wall.

At the cave entrance, the fire blazed to the heavens, and it seemed like the verdant leaves of the wutong tree were about to burn, yet that lance of fire could not take one step past that wutong tree.

This was the wutong in which the Phoenix dwelled. Its blood was fire, its body was fire; the Phoenix was fire incarnate. Over the course of tens of thousands of years, the wutong tree had been imbued with the essence and spirit of fire, so how it could be afraid of flame? The flames of the Setting Sun Palm were no match; even

if the longbow was directly thrown into the Setting Sun Sect's ravine of earthfire, it still would not be damaged in the slightest.

The green branches stretched out, turning the cave and the outside into two worlds, barring the fierce earthfire and Bai Hai from entering.

Separated by the flames, Xu Yourong gazed at Bai Hai, silent and calm.

Bai Hai had a very solemn expression, but he had none of the sense of defeat that should have resulted from the inability of his flames to break through the Tong Bow's defense. He said to her, "My Setting Sun Sect was founded in a remote volcano valley. Besides the terrifyingly hot earthfire, the most abundant thing there is miasma. The miasma and earthfire feed off each other, so I would very much like to know if this longbow can withstand their combination."

With these words, he withdrew his Setting Sun Palm and stepped in front of the wutong tree, then he unhesitatingly gave it another slap.

This time there were no intense flames, only a faint and bizarre Qi accompanied by countless tiny particles shot out of his palm. They blanketed the wutong tree's trunk and leaves.

In an instant, that fresh and green wutong tree looked like it had spent several years in the blustering sands of the north. It was now covered with a thick layer of dust, no longer expressing its former

exuberance.

The dust was formed of the tiny particles, and each of those particles was the essence of the fiery miasma that Bai Hai had breathed in and out and collected over his several hundred years in the remote volcano valley.

For the outer surface to darken was not important, but what was even more frightening was that the particles were corroding the body of the Tong Bow at this very moment. The green leaves of the wutong tree were already beginning to show many thin specks of grey, and those grey specks were growing larger by the second. The bark was similarly beginning to show many horrifying cracks which were continuing to deepen.

If this was in a normal situation, relying on her boundless true essence, Xu Yourong could have prevented the Tong Bow from being contaminated with this dust, to say nothing of the absurdity of her true Phoenix blood being contaminated by such a trifling poison.

But now, she could only rely on the Tong Bow to protect her body from this fiery and poisonous miasma that originated from deep in the earth. How long could the Tong Bow hold on?

Separated by the wutong tree's leaves, she looked at that elder from the Setting Sun Sect and calmly asked, "Why are you doing this?"

Bai Hai replied, "All those who enter the Garden of Zhou do so for

their own benefit, and I am no exception."

Xu Yourong said, "You believe... that the benefits you will obtain from my body exceed the risks that you will face?"

Bai Hai smiled. "I believe it with all my heart."

Xu Yourong indifferently replied, "I could give you endless benefits, benefits that you could not imagine."

There were currently numerous sects on the continent, each of them with their own precious secrets, and for a strange sect like the Setting Sun Sect, this was even more the case. But she definitely had the status to say those words, and in addition, her opponent had no choice but to believe her.

Bai Hai replied, "To earn the gratitude of both the Holy Maiden Peak and the Zhou Dynasty is naturally difficult. Sadly, if I had not forced my lady into such desperate straits, how could I have possibly obtained such benefits?"

Xu Yourong asked, "Did you know who I was this entire time?"

"Yes, venerable Heavenly Maiden... did I say it wrong? I heard that all the sects under Holy Maiden Peak, whether it is the Gentle Stream Monastery or the South Stream Temple, all refer to you in this manner."

Bai Hai smiled at her. "Last night I was at the bottom of the

Sunset Valley, and I saw my lady unfurl her wings of fire."

Xu Yourong said, "You know who I am, but you dare to show such disrespect? You've cultivated for more than two hundred years, but could it be that you can't even control your own greed, so much so that you've gone mad!?"

As she said these words, her expression was still calm, as if she was not angry at all, but possessed a sort of disdain from on high.

Bai Hai calmly replied, "Greed does make one go mad, but I have not gone mad. If this were outside the Garden of Zhou, I would definitely be kneeling at my lady's feet, kissing the ground beneath your shoes, but... this is the Garden of Zhou, and my lady has already been heavily injured by the Demon Princess. If I were to miss this opportunity, I would definitely incur the wrath of heaven."

Xu Yourong gazed at the leaves before her eyes and calmly asked, "What do you plan to gain from me? This divine artifact? Or something else?"

A creepy smile appeared on Bai Hai's elderly face. "I... I want... I want my lady's blood."

Chapter 285 - Cultivating The Dao Has Always Been Unpleasant

Both the inside and outside of the cave were silent. There was only the soft crackling of the miasma corroding the wutong tree, sounding just like tens of thousands of silkworms gnawing away at mulberry leaves. It made one's hair stand on end.

Xu Yourong was silent. The demons that had infiltrated the Garden of Zhou were her true enemies, and anyway, she did not believe that she could obtain victory over this peak level Ethereal Opening elder of the Setting Sun Sect. This was why she had offered to pay an equivalent price so that he would take his leave. If the elder had been worried about a reprisal from the Holy Maiden Peak, she had even been prepared to swear an oath upon her true Phoenix blood.

And yet she had not imagined that what her opponent wanted was her blood.

Whether it was the dossiers in the Li Palace or the information gathered by the Holy Maiden Peak, both the Orthodoxy's north and south had the same evaluation of this Setting Sun Sect elder: cruel and bloodthirsty. But the word 'bloodthirsty' here was a description of his temperament, rather than a perversion similar to those demons who enjoyed dining on the blood and flesh of humans. If this were the case, then the Li Palace and the Holy Maiden Peak would have no need to make an appearance. The Mount Li Sword Sect would have killed this man a long time ago.

She was somewhat confused, but when she remembered that the

Setting Sun Sect's method of cultivation was related to earthfire, she grasped the general idea.

If this man wanted her true Phoenix blood, he naturally could not allow her to continue to live.

"Before I began to cultivate, I was a scholar of the south. My first aspiration in life was to pass the imperial exam, become an official, make money, and marry a beautiful wife. And yet... my lady has lived in Holy Maiden Peak for several years, so you should be familiar with those imperial courts of the south. In reality, they are nothing but puppets for the sects and aristocratic families. Even if I worked my way up to Prime Minister, I would still be a dog at the beck and call of the cultivators."

Bai Hai thought of those events of many years ago and said ruefully, "Only after bobbing about in the bureaucracy for many years did I finally understand this. Thus, I decided to cultivate, but I was old, and it would be difficult for me to cultivate the mysterious, orthodox method to its peak. So I decided to take a gamble and placed myself under the Setting Sun Sect. I could be considered to be rather fortunate. With my lofty scholarly erudition, I excelled at comprehension of the Dao. In the span of just twenty years, I cultivated my way to Ethereal Opening."

As the poisonous miasma slowly corroded the wutong tree, he stood outside the cave while Xu Yourong stood inside. They were close enough to see each other's faces, but they could not touch each other. Since he had time, he decided to reminisce about the past, which could also be considered a sort of explanation to his opponent.

"But it was only up to here," he said rather sadly. "It was impossible for me to take another step forward. The following hundred years of cultivation was just a waste of my life. I was unwilling to accept this. Clearly, I had enough wisdom and experience, and my diligence was not lacking in comparison to others, so why was I never able to break past Ethereal Opening? It couldn't be because of some ordinary reason like a lack of talent, right?"

Saying this, he looked at Xu Yourong behind the tree, barely concealing the anger and envy in his eyes. "But talent is not something that can be decided by oneself, it's something carelessly distributed by the heavens. For what reason are people like you blessed with such fine talent while people like me, no matter how hard we work, can never catch up to you? And exactly why were you allowed to reach the upper level of Ethereal Opening at just fifteen years old while I took more than a hundred years?"

"Later on, I finally found a unique method in the sect that would help me break through Ethereal Opening and cross the threshold into the next realm. It was just that the method's requirements were simply too onerous. It required fire crystals of the highest purity so that I could purify myself once more by exchanging my blood. But the sect's earthfire crystals had long ago been taken away by the martial ancestor and forged into a sword, and then the sword disappeared together with him. So where could I find these fire crystals? Could it be that I still had the ability to cross the sea and search those islands in the Southern Sea for Red Dragons? I bitterly searched the world for more than a decade, but I made no progress. Finally, I thought of a possibility."

Bai Hai inclined his body towards that distant plain and said, "The martial ancestor had died, and the earthfire crystals had disappeared along with his sword. Back then, he was on the verge of entering the Saint Realm, so who could kill him? Of course, the greatest possibility was Zhou Dufu. Then perhaps his sword had been left behind in the Garden of Zhou? Perhaps it lay in the legendary Sword Pool?"

"So this year when the Garden of Zhou opened, I entered without hesitation. Speaking truthfully, I saw the fireworks of warning fired by the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, I even saw one of the human cultivators that had been poisoned to death, but so what? Nothing was more important than finding the martial ancestor's sword, only... I didn't manage to find even the trace of a sword. I couldn't even feel a hint of Qi from an earthfire crystal. I was in despair."

He turned back to Xu Yourong, and his eyes, muddy with age, seemed to gradually burn. "Yet in my moment of despair, I saw my lady open her wings of fire and fly off the peak of Sunset Valley. I knew that my lady was heavily injured, and so I knew that this was my best opportunity to break through, perhaps even my last opportunity!"

"What earthfire essence? My lady's true phoenix blood contains an even more berserk, even more blazing, even purer strength! If I could take my lady's blood, then I could definitely use that secret method and easily break past Ethereal Opening! If I'm successful in condensing fire, then I might even have an opportunity to enter the realm of Saints! For people like us, does my lady know how alluring it is?"

Bai Hai was growing increasingly excited and his voice was growing hoarse.

Xu Yourong looked at him and said, "I don't know."

Bai Hai stared blankly at her, then asked, "What did you say?"

"Cultivating into the next realm has always been very simple for me, like eating or drinking. From the moment I was born, it was already determined that I enter the realm of Saints, so..."

Xu Yourong calmly said, "It is impossible for me to understand your mind."

She said these words very indifferently.

So Bai Hai was filled with an incomparable fury, as well as intense disappointment.

If Chen Changsheng were awake at this moment, he would probably have understood the feelings of the Setting Sun Sect elder. It was not because he had experienced such feelings before, but because he was often like Xu Yourong, causing other people to experience these feelings—sincerely stating an objective fact, causing others to be absolutely baffled and even dumbfounded.

Tang Thirty-Six, who had once gone through such an experience, had once given the following assessment: You and Xu Yourong are both people that make others speechless.

Bai Hai truly was speechless. After a moment, he furiously bellowed, "Talent? Heaven is unjust! In a little while when I suck you clean of your blood, your talent will be mine! Then I will correct this injustice!"

Xu Yourong understood his reason, so she paid him no more attention. She had no interest in the enraged but cultured bellows of a cold-blooded cultivator.

She walked over to Chen Changsheng's side and sat down. Crossing her legs, she began to steady her breathing. At some point, several extremely pure essence crystals had ended up in her hands.

In the Garden of Zhou, it was impossible to communicate with stars in the sky, so she could not sense her own Fated Star. Last night, she had used crystals to very laboriously gather up some true essence, but once again she was beginning to feel a lack of true essence.

This fact made her feel rather unpleasant. It was like how she did not care for Bai Hai's treachery and murderous intent; how she, as the next Holy Maiden, had rushed across the Garden of Zhou for two days and nights for the sake of humanity's future; how she had engaged in successive bloody battles with the Demon Princess; and now when she had finally entered into these desperate straits, she would die at the hands of a human cultivator. These facts together made her feel very unpleasant.

Separated by the leaves of the wutong tree, Bai Hai saw her brows slightly rise and guessed at what she was thinking. Teasing her, he said, "Do you think it's unfair?"

Xu Yourong was sitting down, her expression serene. Although she did not answer, it felt like she was saying, could it be that there is actually someone that would dare to say that this is fair?

"I know that you think that a human like me is cruel and selfish, treacherous and deceitful... but did you ever think that maybe there isn't much difference between the two of us? Do you really think you're a phoenix? Do you really think you are as pure and stainless as you imagine? Do you really think that you're a symbol of virtue?"

Bai Hai's elderly face carried a sense of contempt and disdain as he pointed at Chen Changsheng behind her. "Last night I saw you fly down from Sunset Valley, then I quietly chased after you. Although I didn't see how you managed to save that person, I'd imagine it was definitely in front of those demon experts. So then why is it that previously you were prepared to leave him behind in that patch of reeds? I didn't see what you were doing in the forest, but I'd imagine it was that oh-so-cliché mental struggle. But why did you struggle? Does the fact that no-one is looking have some sort of influence on you? Perhaps what you really care about isn't virtue and righteousness, but the opinions of others!"

These words were without a doubt extremely condemning.

This Setting Sun Sect elder did not know that not too long ago, the little Black Dragon girl had also given a similar evaluation of

Xu Yourong.

Without a doubt, these words were extremely condemning, and very difficult to oppose.

Xu Yourong's expression was very calm, as if she had not even heard those words, as if she disdained to justify herself.

This sort of disdain was not a result of pretense from speechlessness, but rather that she really was not affected by those words.

She had never really cared about the opinions of others. She did not care what those demon experts thought, so she naturally did not care for what this shameless human cultivator thought either.

Contrarily, when she heard Bai Hai's words, she secretly sighed in relief.

Because those words had divulged a new piece of information: this person had not seen what she had done in the forest.

But in the end, being mocked and shamed by another person was still rather unpleasant.

She gazed behind her at Chen Changsheng, slightly creasing her brow as she thought to herself, if I didn't need to bring this person, I would have easily been able to escape last night. Even back at the cliff with Bai Hai, there were at least three ways I could have

escaped, not at all like right now being trapped in this cave. In a little while, this man might even drink my blood...

From the moment her blood had awakened, she had occupied a very special position in the human world. Whether it was the Divine Empress or her teacher the Holy Maiden, they all doted on her. As for her fellow students of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green or her fellow disciples of Holy Maiden Peak, or even all the cultivators of the world, when would they dare to show her the slightest lack of respect? And to actually think of drinking her blood?

This was also naturally a rather unpleasant affair.

She could not accept it.

She took out her Fated Star Plate and her fingers flew across it. Those complex lines incessantly fluctuated, forming even more complex designs.

"What's this? A Fate Plate?" Outside the cave, Bai Hai felt slightly uneasy at this scene.

Xu Yourong ignored him and continued her calculations.

Chapter 286 - His Hand Which Passed Through Her Black Hair

It was a pity that even until the end, the image on the Fated Star Plate remained a blur, just like the Garden of Zhou before her eyes.

She could not see her own fate; not even the smallest direction could be seen. However, in a certain area in the image, she saw a few gray trajectories.

Seeing someone else's fate was slightly easier than seeing your own fate after all.

She once again looked at the unconscious Chen Changsheng. Somewhat confused, she wondered what connection she had with this person, just because she had saved him. This person's trajectory of fate was so dull, and almost no life could be seen, just like how it was confirmed in the patch of reeds before. If there were no accidents, this person would definitely die.

“As long as you have not died, I will do my best to make you live. But... if you are destined to die, is it possible to ask for you to go die a little earlier by yourself, and not pull me down with you?”

That was what she thought when she looked at Chen Changsheng.

Retreating into the mountain cave, she found it to be a dead end. Her true essence had basically been entirely exhausted, the spirit of

the phoenix had fallen asleep again, and it was impossible for the Tong Bow to last forever.

On the verdant wutong tree, more and more gray patches had already begun to appear. Those were all signs of miasma.

She lowered her head, and brought the tips of her index fingers together. She muttered to herself, "It's fine, it's fine, Rong'er will definitely be fine."

At this moment, she was just like an ordinary girl. She felt somewhat wronged and hurt, and rather worried.

Her weakness only lasted for a moment, and so did her feeling of being wronged.

A while later, she calmed down.

She had never been an ordinary girl.

She was Xu Yourong.

She raised her head. Her eyes were bright.

She decided to take the risk and kill this person.

Time continued to flow. Before she had walked too far, the tree

grown from the Tong Bow, which should have been able to last even longer, suddenly transformed into glimmers of light. It disappeared from the mouth of the cave.

She extended both of her arms out of the cave, and drew two lines of fire in the air, attacking Bai Hai.

Under the circumstance that she was clearly losing, she personally removed her final defense and attacked before the opponent could. This was a very brave and unexpected choice, and obviously also extremely sudden. However, Bai Hai, who had made an almost insane decision the night before to get the phoenix blood, was always in his greatest condition—indeed, even he who was perhaps judged as cold-hearted and bloodthirsty also felt that this matter was very insane. This allowed him to feel excitement and nervousness at a level which he had never felt before, which caused him to maintain his peak condition at all times. Only due to this could he find Xu Yourong's tracks, and also receive his opponent's counterattack very firmly.

The wutong tree disappeared, and the miasma coating it turned to dust, dispersing at the mouth of the cave.

Bai Hai's firm yet powerful palm burst through the dust, directly meeting the two lines of fire that carried a sacred feeling.

With a bang, even more dust rose into the air both inside and outside the cave. Afterwards, there was an extremely loud shrill sound. The two shadows constantly flared with sparks, causing the temperature to rise sharply.

The two lines of fire suddenly disappeared, and the gust created from the palm whistled wildly. A person retreated back into the depths of the cave at great speed. The person was unable to keep their footing, and crashed heavily on the stone, giving out a muffled sound of impact.

The person who was forced back was Xu Yourong. She did not care about the pain brought from the impact, and extended her hand to the side of her body.

How would Bai Hai give her the opportunity to rest and set up her defense again? Transforming into a gray shadow, he arrived in front of her, and the magical artifact in his hand suddenly gave out a bright light. It knocked away the Tong Bow that she had just grasped again. At the same time, he rushed forwards, and his skinny hand shot out like a lightning bolt, firmly choking Xu Yourong by the throat.

The battle ended very quickly.

Xu Yourong no longer made any futile resistance and only furrowed her brows slightly. She did not spit any blood, and her complexion became even paler. She seemed very weak.

Even during ordinary times, Bai Hai, who had spent over two hundred years of hard cultivating to reach peak level Ethereal Opening, would have been a match for her in a fight for a while, let alone the fact that she was currently suffering from heavy injuries, and all of her true essence was already consumed.

There were no surprises in the final outcome.

However, Bai Hai himself found that it was an unbelievable result.

“You have lost,” he said tremulously, looking at Xu Yourong. His old face revealed an abnormal flush.

That was the product of excitement and agitation, as well as some fear and worry.

The reincarnation of a Heavenly Phoenix just lost to him like this? He actually won so easily?

He said with slight disbelief, “Just who was it that could injure you so heavily?”

Naturally, Xu Yourong did not reply to his question. Her expression remained calm, as if the opponent was not holding her by the neck and controlling her fate at all.

This type of disregard caused Bai Hai to grow mad once again. He yelled loudly, “Right now, I just need to move a finger, and you will die like that. Even in such a situation, you refuse to speak to me?”

Xu Yourong shot a glance at him quietly. She remained silent,

and used her silence to express her feelings.

Bai Hai laughed out of anger, and his voice became slightly strange. “Don’t think that that is enough to trigger me to kill you. Don’t worry, I will definitely let you live. Watch as I suck all the blood out of you.”

Xu Yourong finally revealed an expression that carried a sliver of hatred.

It was not dread, nor was it fear. There was only hatred.

Bai Hai leaned forwards and looked at her face. With a slightly trembling voice, he said emotionally, “Your face... how do you do it? It’s actually so realistic.”

Xu Yourong looked at the sinister, old face, and suddenly felt slightly regretful.

“I have never thought that there would actually be a day where I am so close to you.”

Bai Hai looked at her eyes which were bright like autumn water. He gave out a horrid laugh. “Hahahaha, this really is an honor.”

After saying that, he leaned in once again, and the distance between the two of them decreased even more.

Xu Yourong looked at him quietly. Although she did not say anything, it gave him the feeling of a sacred presence that should not be offended.

For some unknown reason, Bai Hai suddenly lost all interest in making fun of his opponent after gazing into her eyes. It had even made him feel slightly disturbed. With a slightly agitated voice, he said, “Don’t worry, I will let my lady die with some dignity... so even if my lady has some final attack, I hope my lady will not use it. Otherwise, I really don’t know what resentful thing I might do once all hope has been lost.”

Xu Yourong turned her head with some difficulty, and no longer looked at him. Afterwards, she closed her eyes.

Bai Hai stared blankly at that, before lowering his head to her neck.

He had never done something like this, so he was slightly anxious. He became even more anxious, especially when thinking about the fact that she was the true Holy Maiden, a reincarnation of a Heavenly Phoenix that was holy and should not be assaulted. As a result, his actions became slightly clumsy.

In the next moment, Xu Yourong furrowed her brows again, as if she was in some pain.

Bai Hai’s pupils became extremely constricted.

He felt that this was the most delicious nectar he had ever had in his life.

But... why was there so little?

In the next moment, he forgot about that question. The liquid that flowed through his mouth seemed to hide a vast and limitless amount of flame, as if it was the essence of the actual sun. It was countless times purer than the earthfire in the Setting Sun Sect. How could the legendary earthfire crystal even be compared to it?

Although it was just a moment, he felt that there was an infinite amount of energy being channeled into his body.

With only a mouthful, he became drunk. His white eyebrows rose, and he constantly blinked. In the throes of intoxication, he presented an extremely bizarre figure.

Xu Yourong could not see his face, and he could not see Xu Yourong's face. As a result, he did not realize that Xu Yourong had opened her eyes.

She looked at the walls of the cave quietly.

For some reason, although she had already arrived in front of the abyss of death, and currently suffered such humiliation and cruelty, her expression remained very calm, as if she was thinking of other matters.

Time flowed slowly, and yet so steadfastly that it could inspire fear.

Suddenly, Xu Yourong's eyebrows were furrowed slightly again, because she had discovered that she seemed to have calculated wrongly.

Even if she was able to kill that evil old bastard, all of the blood in her body would also be sucked dry by him.

This time, she revealed a real regretfulness in her eyes. Although it was very little, it was still some regret.

She did not want to die like this, and did not want to die at this moment even more. The old bastard's torso was still on top of her body.

However, just like the trajectories of fate in the starry sky, once it began, it was unstoppable.

This was the decision she had made. This was her plan. Once it began, she became a component of the plan, no longer able to stop the arrival of the end result.

Was this her fate?

She thought silently.

Fate was unchangeable.

No matter if it was the south or the north of the Orthodoxy, they all believed so.

However, some people did not believe that.

For example, Wang Zhice, for example, those people who absolutely needed to change their fates.

Xu Yourong believed that her own fate was unchangeable and that she could only die together with that old bastard. In the end, she would become a corpse that would not be discovered by anyone in the cave. However, she had forgotten that there was someone else in the cave.

A hand was raised in front of her eyes. With her gaze, it slowly moved towards her neck.

The hand was not big. Its nails were cut very cleanly, and its fingers were long. Normally, it was very warm, but now it was very cold instead. There was even some remaining frost between the fingers.

That hand seemed somewhat exhausted and powerless, however, it was firm. It passed through her black hair, brushed past her ear lobe and landed on her neck...

That hand slowly but firmly grabbed Bai Hai's face, and then

pushed away.

Chapter 287 - The Black Frost Qi Of The Snow Mountain Sect, A Slap On The Face, And Poison In The Blood

Just like how Xu Yourong had forgotten about the unconscious Chen Changsheng, Bai Hai had never paid any attention to that young cultivator whose body was caked with frost. Moreover, he was currently reveling in the rapturous happiness induced by the Heavenly Phoenix's true blood, and so he did not put up any sort of guard. Thus, that hand managed to push him away.

In the quiet of the cave, Bai Hai stared at Chen Changsheng with a stunned expression. Only after a while did he realize that something had happened, that there was something amiss.

Right now, there was a still a drop of blood at the corner of his lips. When paired with his rather twisted and elderly face, it created a grotesque image. Just as that drop of blood was about to drip down, he suddenly sobered up, then somewhat confusedly used his tongue to bring that drop of blood back into his mouth. In order to cultivate the secret method of the Setting Sun Sect and break past Ethereal Opening, every drop of Xu Yourong's blood was exceptionally precious for him, but he could not help but make the picture even more grotesque.

For some reason, he felt that while he could taste sweetness at the back of his tongue, the tip of his tongue was somewhat numb. He thought to himself, is this the flavor of the Heavenly Phoenix's blood?

While this was happening, Chen Changsheng used the support of the cave wall to laboriously sit up. He was at present very weak. It seemed like he would be knocked over by a passing gust of wind, so how could he subdue this opponent and obtain victory?

Bai Hai felt a dull pain on his face and used his hand to rub it. He realized that his face was covered with water, then he looked at Chen Changsheng's hand and realized that it was also covered with frost, and he could not help but squint his eyes.

Without any warning, he pointed his finger at Chen Changsheng, then fired a strand of Qi imbued with terrifying earthfire at him.

Chen Changsheng seemingly subconsciously slapped his palm in the air, causing a mirror of ice to instantly form in the air in front of him.

When the earthfire Qi collided with the mirror of ice, they both evaporated with a hiss.

Bai Hai narrowed his eyes even more, then he made a weird smile. "Actually a secret disciple of the Snow Mountain Sect. You think you can use the Black Frost True Qi to block me?"

The Snow Mountain Sect was a sect located in the northwest of the continent. Tradition has it that the founder of the Snow Mountain Sect possessed the blood of the Black Frost Dragon and created a brand-new method of cultivation, thus founding his monastery on the frigid lands of the northwest. At its peak, the sect was incredibly powerful. Neither the demons nor the

Orthodoxy in the Central Plains would lightly provoke it. Yet with the passage of time, the blood of the Black Frost Dragon grew increasingly thin, and the power of the Snow Mountain Sect gradually waned. It had already been several hundred years since it had been placed under the authority of the Li Palace, and it had also been many years since it had produced a true expert or promising young disciple.

No one would underestimate a once-glorious sect. Just as the South Stream Temple was divided into an inner and outer sect, many powerful figures knew that the Snow Mountain Sect also had a secret sect, only it very rarely revealed itself to the world. The Setting Sun Sect cultivated earthfire, so they were natural enemies of the Snow Mountain Sect which cultivated the cold. In the past, they had clashed with each other many times. As an elder of the Setting Sun Sect, Bai Hai naturally had a deep understanding of the Snow Mountain Sect. He saw the frosty aura being released by Chen Changsheng's bared dagger for him, and with one sentence had seen through his origins. Simultaneously, the killing intent in his heart also suddenly increased several times.

As Xu Yourong looked at Chen Changsheng's face, she thought to herself, so he was actually a secret disciple of Snow Mountain Sect—no wonder his method of cultivation was so special.

Her vision was somewhat blurry, and yet she could clearly see the tranquility in Chen Changsheng's eyes. The situation was still clearly desperate and Chen Changsheng was still weak and heavily injured, and yet for some reason, she suddenly felt that she could relax, that she could hand over all the matters that weighed on her to this young cultivator.

"I didn't think that I would actually meet my old friend, the Snow Mountain Sect, in the Garden of Zhou. Nor did I think that just as I was about to achieve a miracle, I would still have to kill one more person."

Bai Hai looked at him and gave a strange chuckle. "It's a good thing that this won't be too hard to take care of."

With these words, he wielded his palm like a blade wreathed in fire and ruthlessly chopped at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng seemed to have little chance in his current weak and heavily injured condition; even if he was healthy and full of energy, he still would not be any match for this Setting Sun Sect elder.

His awakening seemingly had no meaning. One could even say that he woke up at the worst possible time.

The true essence in his body was still exhausted. He did not even have the strength to hold his dagger, much less summon the Yellow Paper Umbrella.

He had no way to block this fire palm. The only thing he could do is lift up his palm and hit that elder's face.

When he had just woken up, he had no idea what was going on, nor did he know who this old man was. He only knew that this old man was doing a very disgusting and cruel thing. The old man's

face was somewhat stiff and weird, and the sound of his laughter was sinister and terrifying. He could immediately tell that this was not a good man, so... he wanted to hit him.

In the very next moment, he could be turned into slag by this old man's fire palm, but he still wanted to hit him. As long as he could score a hit on that old man's sinister and terrible old face, then he would not have woken up for nothing.

Chen Changsheng thought this way, so that is what he did.

However, he had never imagined that his palm was actually able to strike the old man's face.

A crisp slap echoed through the cave.

His palm had struck Bai Hai's face.

Although he waved his palm around like a feather, like there was not a single strand of strength in it, the sound it produced was very clear.

Slap.

Bai Hai was at a loss. He had no idea of what just happened.

His palm still hung in the air, separated from Chen Changsheng by one foot. The terrifying earthfire at the edge of the palm was

gradually dissipating, seeming rather miserable.

How was the palm of this Snow Mountain Sect disciple able to land on his face? How had his body become so stiff? Why did the true essence in his body suddenly vanish? In an instant, endless questions entered his mind, making him confused and terrified.

In the next moment, that fear expressed itself in his eyes. With great difficulty, he lowered his neck to look at Xu Yourong, then said his last words.

His voice was abnormally hoarse and dry, his words intermittent and hard to form into sentences, full of fear and despair. "Demon... demon... demoness... blood has... poison!"

With these words, he died.

Setting Sun Sect elder, peak level Ethereal Opening expert Bai Hai died in this cave like that.

When he died, his body was already completely stiff. His right hand remained suspended in the air, and even his eyes could not close. His eyes were suffused with a tranquil green. It was just like carving a sculpture made out of ordinary rock and finding jade within.

This picture was very bizarre, and very sinister.

Soon after, his skin began to fester. This festering did not extend

to his bones and muscles, only his skin. The surface of his skin gradually began to show a plethora of multi-colored spots.

Some of the spots were beautiful, while others were disgusting.

Chen Changsheng thought all of them were very disgusting.

Only now did he realize that this old man had already been poisoned. He just did not know what it was that he was poisoned by.

The weird smile on the old man's face was the poison's doing. At that point, his spiritual sense had already begun to gradually separate from the body.

The poison was really too brutal.

He then realized that there was still someone else in this cave and turned to her.

That young lady's dress was covered with bloodstains, almost obscuring the original white. Her normally delicate features were also almost covered up by her weakness and exhaustion, and yet her eyes were still clear and cold.

He stared blankly at her, then asked, "Are you okay?"

.....

Chapter 288 - If Life Could Be Like The Moment When We First Met (Part One)

For some reason, Chen Changsheng spoke much slower than usual, as if his tongue was tied, making him seem both slow and stupid.

Xu Yourong did not answer him. With great effort, she lifted herself off the ground to sit up, then feebly leaned against the cave wall. Then she lifted her head, this simple action causing her face to pale even more, and looked at the already dead Bai Hai. She examined his elderly face, speckled with a rainbow of colors, in silence.

The previous moment had been the most danger she had ever been in for her entire life. She had discarded the Tong Bow, faked an attack, then inevitably lost, purposely letting Bai Hai capture her. All this was so that she could have this Setting Sun Sect elder suck her blood, because only she knew that her true Phoenix blood was mixed with the poison that Nanke had implanted within her last night.

This extremely risky and disgusting plan had really succeeded, but just as she had thought in that moment of remorse, if Bai Hai had not been pushed away from her neck by that hand at the very last moment, then Bai Hai really could have sucked her clean of her last true Phoenix essence blood before dying of poison, and then she would really have died.

Thinking about this, she finally turned to Chen Changsheng, her right hand drawing the Tong Bow close to her body. She wore a

cold expression, giving off an unapproachable feeling.

This delicate young lady had a cold expression and a noble air seemed to hang about her, making her seem exceedingly aloof. If this were any normal youth, they would feel ashamed upon gazing at this strange character, and then would secretly be filled with admiration. But Chen Changsheng felt neither of these two feelings. In the capital, he had met with Mo Yu and Luoluo many times and was very used to this noble and pure atmosphere, so he appeared very calm. And yet for some reason, he felt like this young lady gave him a very comfortable feeling, like a spring forest after a rain.

Xu Yourong was somewhat astonished by his calmness, but was also satisfied. Without any movement, her longbow disappeared.

Chen Changsheng stared blankly at her, then recalled some of the words that had faintly entered his ear while he was unconscious.

This young lady was actually one of the legendary elves?

It was said that countless years ago, there was no vast and boundless ocean between the Great Western Continent and the Eastern continent and that they were connected. Back then, the Great Western Continent was called the Great Western Mountain Range. A tribe of spirits once lived in the Great Western Mountain Range, and this tribe married with the demi-humans, leaving behind many descendants of mixed blood. Later on when the Great Western Continent split from the Eastern Continent, these mixed bloods remained on the Eastern Continent. Because they had elegant (秀) appearances and swift (灵) movements, they were

called the [elves \(秀灵\)](#).

(TL: The actual name of this race is the Xiuling (秀灵), but in terms of description, they are basically elves.)

Besides their fresh and elegant appearance, they also inherited a love of nature from the spirit tribe. The elves were most known for their archery. Every elf was an expert in the bow and arrow. In the war between the demi-humans and the demons, the elves played an extremely important role, and it was precisely for this reason that they became the demons' most despised opponents. Finally, two thousand years ago, because of the Wolf Tribe's betrayal, the ancestral mountain of the elves was besieged by the demon army. The demi-humans were not in time to save them and the elves were massacred, their race nearly exterminated. Only a few young elves managed to escape from those mountains by way of a narrow underground passage.

If the story had ended here, perhaps it would have been for the better, but the fact was that those elves that had escaped the iron hoof of the demon army suffered an even more miserable fate. Because of their elegant appearance and enchanting bodies, those elves that could not be brought back to the two banks of the Red River very naturally became the prey for many very powerful figures. Whether it was the nobles of Xuelao City or the human nobles, they all wanted to have the glory of an elf as their slave.

Almost one thousand years ago, when the humans allied with the demi-humans against the demons, the miserable fate of the elves finally improved. The Taizong Emperor issued a decree banning the buying and selling of elves, but many of the mansions of the aristocracy still concealed many elves. Only when the chief princess of the Great Western Continent married the White

Emperor and then established a relationship with the Tianhai Divine Empress did the enforcement of this decree incessantly increase in ferocity, finally leading to a true turn for the better. After several of the great families of the south were completely exterminated by the Divine Empress for raising and killing dozens of elves, this phenomenon finally disappeared from the human world.

But after experiencing so many years of slavery and torment, the already few elves became even rarer. At present, the vast majority of the elves lived within White Emperor City, while some had crossed the ocean to the Great Western Continent. In the past few decades, whether in the capital or Wenshui City, the figures of elves were very rarely seen.

Knowing that the young lady was an elf, the gaze that Chen Changsheng directed towards her could not help but be filled with sympathy. He thought to himself, no wonder she, with only a bow and arrows, could enter the Garden of Zhou. At the same time, he felt more relieved at that clear and cold resentment in her appearance. If he were an elf, he would also not have a good impression of humans.

He had just woken up and there were many things he did not understand. He didn't know how he had ended up in this cave. Last night before he had slipped into unconsciousness, just what was that light he saw?

He asked, "Did you save me?"

Xu Yourong calmly replied, "You don't need to thank me."

Chen Changsheng did not quite know how to respond. He thought to himself, didn't I just save you a few minutes ago? After staring blankly for a while, he asked, "May I ask who you are?"

Xu Yourong was somewhat stunned, and only then did she understand that he did not recognize her—it must be known that on a normal day, no matter where she went, she would always be recognized. This was because her temperament was so unusual, but even more importantly, because she was born beautiful.

This had nothing to do with narcissism, it was an objective fact. The entire continent regarded her as the number one beauty, and even the demon nobles of Xuelao City had no objection to this.

She wanted to ask, could it be that you don't recognize me? But then she remembered that before she entered the Garden of Zhou, she had exchanged appearances with one of the priests of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green...because she did not want to meet that guy.

Upon thinking of that guy, she felt even more exhausted, and softly said, "Can you walk?"

Chen Changsheng's injuries had not yet recovered. He had just woken up and his body was weak all over, but he did not want to be a burden and so he said, "Yes."

"Very good, then you'll carry me." Xu Yourong calmly added, "You are not allowed to abandon me."

Chen Changsheng once again stared blankly, thinking to himself, so originally it had this meaning. He circulated his true Qi to confirm his situation, then nodded his head.

He did so very reluctantly. It was not that he was not willing, but the situation of his body was simply too terrible.

Xu Yourong knew very well the current status of his body, but she gave no words of consolation or encouragement. In her view, those cliché encouragements were meaningless wastes of strength.

"I've lost a lot of blood. I'm very weak," she added.

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, when I woke up, I just happened to see that old freak sucking your blood, but back then you had a very calm look in your eyes. Moreover, that old freak soon died from the poison in your blood. It's very obvious that this was a trap that you laid for him. For you to say this to me right now, what's the meaning behind it? Another thing is, just why did that old freak want your blood anyway?

Xu Yourong recognized that he was confused and said somewhat helplessly, "I think it's too disgusting."

Puzzled, Chen Changsheng asked, "And then?"

Xu Yourong said, "I don't want to remember that scene, but also I'm rather weak and I'm about to pass out."

With these words, she did not give Chen Changsheng any chance to protest or ask questions. She straightforwardly closed her eyes, then leaned against the cave wall and passed out.

Chen Changsheng was caught rather unprepared by this unexpected change. After thinking it over, he felt that what this young lady had said was too reasonable, so he had no choice but to accept.

He did not immediately take her away, as he still had to steady his breathing and recover his strength. He also had to carefully examine his body. Last night on the lake at the other side of the cold pool, he had battled with those two demon women for a long time, and his internal organs had suffered severe injuries. He did not want to carry this young lady out of the cave and then immediately spit up blood and die.

When the mind arose from the sea of consciousness to the outside, this was the spiritual sense. When it went in the opposite direction, this was Meditative Introspection.

He saw the lake outside his Ethereal Palace, but it was different from before—that sphere of water formed by the lake water was mixed with lots of ice and emitted a frigid air. This made the Spirit Mountain upon which the Ethereal Palace sat appear unclear. Occasionally, a strong wind would blow across, causing some of the ice to slowly descend. After who knows how long had passed, the wasteland was covered with a shallow layer of white.

Last night during his battle, he had burned up nearly all of his true essence and that mantle of snow over the wasteland had melted into nothing long ago. And he could not sense his Fated Star in the Garden of Zhou, so he worried about being unable to recover his true essence. When he saw this scene, it wasn't sufficient to say that he was pleasantly surprised. Only, why was the lake around his Ethereal Palace so cold?

His spiritual sense passed through the icy surface of the lake and proceeded deeper, then... he saw something that deeply moved him.

A thin Black Dragon was peacefully sleeping in the lake, ceaselessly releasing its Qi. The Qi was so cold and so pure.

Only then did Chen Changsheng realize that this was just like that first time he underwent Meditation in the underground space and self-immolated; the Black Dragon had once again saved his life. The coldness emitted from deep within the dragon soul helped him recover his true essence and lower his pulse, simultaneously ceaselessly healing the countless cuts on his internal organs. Compared to back then, though, the Black Dragon now was many times smaller. Its curled-up body in the lake was just like a snoozing child and was very cute.

The Black Dragon was right now a mere spiritual soul. In order to save him, it had inevitably paid an enormous price, causing it to be in such a deep sleep.

Without it, he would probably have already died. He looked at the jade ruyi that had appeared on his hands in silence.

Afterwards, he looked at the unconscious white-clothed girl leaning against the cave wall. He did not know what had happened last night, but he could roughly guess that if it were not for her, he would also have already been dead. The girl was an elf, and although it was said that humans and demi-humans walked separate paths, he had always been close to demi-humans. Even if this girl had not saved his life, he still would not have abandoned her, not to mention the current situation.

Only, how would he carry her away? After he recovered some of his strength, he kneeled down by the white-clothed girl. He extended his hands and tried out a few positions, but he always felt them to be inappropriate. At this tense moment, he was not like some pedantic old virtuous nobleman, worrying about the differences between sexes. It was just that he really did not have much experience in this aspect—should he grab her by the belt and carry her out? Support her by the arm and travel together? Carry her horizontally in his bosom? In the end, the simplest method was the most reliable. He brought her up to his back, and then his two hands grabbed her thighs.

Carrying her on his back, he walked out of the cave. After examining his surroundings, he began to walk on the fallen leaves of the forest, slowly making his way to the foothills. He knew the geography of the Garden of Zhou very well, so he knew that if he continued straight forward, he would eventually arrive at the Mountainside Whispering Wood. Yet he had not even arrived at the winding 'Z' of the mountain path before he stopped.

Chapter 289 - If Life Could Be Like The Moment When We First Met (Part Two)

Time seemed to endlessly flow by, but in actuality, it passed very slowly. From the time Xu Yourong carried him into the forest to the conclusion of that revolting battle, not much time had passed. The Garden of Zhou's sun had not risen much above the horizon. The morning wind and the morning light together fell upon the forest. Cut into every size and shape, the morning wind slowly swept up the fallen leaves, causing them to softly rustle, while the morning light suffused them with every kind of light.

Chen Changsheng gazed off into the distance in silence.

He had none of Zhexiu's natural instinct for danger, nor did he have the ability to use Xu Yourong's Fated Star Plate calculate the dangers ahead. In those far off places bathed in the morning light, he saw no figures, nor did he sense any danger, much less see any of his enemies. But he felt that it was too quiet over there. While silence was not a sufficient reason, he still felt that something was off.

Although there were Three Thousand Scriptures of the Great Dao, he only cultivated the Dao of following his heart. Those two demon beauties were no doubt still chasing after him, and he could possibly meet a treacherous and terrifying human cultivator like that old freak. And since he had no way of protecting himself, he could only rely on his senses, rely on the only Dao he had cultivated over his more than ten years of life.

So without any hesitation, he turned and began walking through

the forest to the other direction. His expression was somewhat hurried, but his feet were incapable of hurrying. This was because he was still severely injured and was now carrying the white-clothed girl on his back. But even more importantly, it was because his body was much colder than usual. His breathing and heartbeat were at least a third slower than normal. His eyebrows and the hair around his forehead were once again covered with frost. The dew which stained his shirt had frozen into flakes of snow, which were blown off his body by the morning wind, only for dew to rapidly freeze on his body once more, and then once again be blown off by the wind. They fluttered down behind him, leaving behind a very clear trail through the forest.

Not long after he left, heralded by a chilly air, Nanke and the zither-playing old man arrived at that place. Her gaze moved across that trail of frost into the distance. How sharp was her gaze that she could so casually glance at this trail and obtain so much information? Chen Changsheng had already awakened and he was carrying Xu Yourong on his back as they made their escape. His injuries had clearly not recovered and his steps seemed somewhat slow.

A hint of confusion appeared on the slightly wide space between her brows. According to what her maids had told her, Chen Changsheng had been heavily injured last night. He should still be hanging on the brink of death, so how did he so quickly recover? Her spiritual sense had also sensed Bai Hai's corpse in that cave, but she had no time to find out what had happened there. She thrust out her arms to both sides of her body.

Those two demon beauties transformed into two lights, vanishing without a trace. A pair of green wings appeared behind

her back, then with the whistling of the wind, she disappeared. The zither-playing old man looked out of the forest and confirmed that the mysterious and dangerous plain was not far from here. He couldn't help but crease his brow as he guessed at what might occur. But he had no other choice than to follow.

The forest gave way to the shore of a pool of water. Green patches of reeds took up his entire vision like they were about to fill the horizon, but in fact, the moment he passed this patch of reeds, he would be in the plains. The cold Qi had helped Chen Changsheng suppress his wounds, but it had also greatly slowed his metabolism. Right now, his heartbeat and breathing were far too slow, so he also walked very slowly. It had taken him a long time before he finally reached this point.

He did not know that not too long ago, Xu Yourong had carried him out of that patch of reeds across from him. He only knew that if he continued forward, he might mistakenly end up in the terrifying plains. And yet he had no other choice except to follow his heart. Following the path upon which he had come, he made his way into the wetland. As his body moved through the water, it brought ice along with it.

He walked into the patch of reeds, and just as he was beginning to ponder whether he should risk going forward or turning to another direction, the sound of the wind on the shore told him that there was no need to think.

With a cold and clear wind, the surroundings were suffused with a pure green light, robbing all the trees and reeds of their color.

A little girl with a cold expression appeared on the shore. She stared at him expressionlessly as if he were a cricket or an ant.

Seeing her disheveled hair and bloodstained clothes, and most importantly of all, her appearance, Chen Changsheng was startled, like he had seen something that was somewhat surprising. Besides, he was not holding his dagger right now because he knew that the difference in strength between him and this demon expert was too great. Since battle was meaningless, he chose to be silent, thus giving off a very calm appearance.

He had always been very calm and steady. No matter what big thing occurred, he would never grow melancholy, nor would he ever lose his head in panic. This part of his character allowed him to possess a temperament far surpassing his age, and also made people feel surprised. Xu Yourong was surprised, and now Nanke was also surprised. She did not believe that this was the youth who had received such deep favor from the Pope, so she asked, "So you are Chen Changsheng?"

Chen Changsheng had never met her, nor did he know that she was the Demon Lord's most beloved daughter. However, yesterday on the lakeshore, he had heard Zhexiu mention that name. From the look on Zhexiu's face back then, he was very certain that this little girl was extremely frightening. Similarly, he did not know that her target was the white-clothed girl on his back. He thought that she had come to kill him, so he was even more vigilant than usual. But he was also childishly happy—to think that not too long ago, he was just a young and unremarkable Daoist fresh from the countryside of Xining Village, but now he had already matured into a target worthy of even the attentions of the most frightening and powerful demons. As he thought this way, he returned the

question. "So you are Nanke?"

This was the first time that Chen Changsheng would meet Nanke, and this was also the first time Nanke would meet Chen Changsheng. In the future, they would represent the humans and demons and meet many times on the battlefield, engaging in hand-to-hand combat and creating a not at all interesting story that would only cause one to feel exhausted. More than once, Nanke would think back to that morning they first met and would often feel a faint sense of remorse. She would think to herself, if I had been a bit more decisive that day and not listened to any of his nonsense, then maybe I really could have killed him there, and then there would be none of these troubles or stories.

But time would always fly like an arrow. The Nanke of the present had no way of knowing of the future. As expected, her focus was still on Xu Yourong, even though she was clearly unconscious. As for Chen Changsheng, he was just a person she was talking to. "If you put her down, I'll spare your life."

When she said these words, Nanke maintained her cold expression, but the two maids at her side were rather shocked. They thought to themselves, what's happened to the master? To actually negotiate with a human, and it seems like she's just going to let Chen Changsheng go like this? The heated battle they fought by the lakeside yesterday... didn't this mean it would be meaningless?

The reason they thought this way was because they did not know that last night in that battle on the peak of Sunset Valley, Nanke had also been severely injured. More importantly, Nanke could

clearly see that since Chen Changsheng was standing on that patch of reeds, he could at any time escape into the water. Within that seemingly clear and empty water, there was actually a dividing line, and on the other side of this line was the plains.

Nanke did not want Chen Changsheng to think that he had already taken the path of no return and thus jump into the water, because even she feared that boundless and mysterious plain.

Hearing Nanke's words, Chen Changsheng was rather shocked. It was only then that he realized that her target was not him—but he definitely could not leave Xu Yourong behind and escape with his own life. At this time, he still did not know that the white-clothed girl on his back was Xu Yourong, nor was he accustomed to carrying things on his back as he walked like Xu Yourong was. It was just that he had promised her that he would not abandon her.

"I can't do that," he said very truthfully to Nanke, then he looked at her appearance and seemed to hesitate.

In Nanke's somewhat dull and indifferent eyes appeared some confusion. She did not understand where Chen Changsheng's odd expression came from, so she asked, "What's wrong?"

Chen Changsheng thought it over, then said, "You are ill."

At these words, Nanke's eyebrows suddenly leapt up, just like a little girl who had gotten up early in the morning to gather a basket of pigweed and was snatched away by her drunken neighbor. She was very angry and her voice suddenly got higher.

"You're the one that's ill! Your entire family is ill! Everyone in the Orthodox Academy is ill!"

The furious shouts of this childish yet exceptionally cold little girl resounded throughout the peaceful reeds.

The two maids were silent. They didn't know why their master had suddenly gotten so angry, nor why Chen Changsheng's words had triggered such a huge response.

Hearing the stream of shouts and curses from the shore, Chen Changsheng felt somewhat helpless. He thought to himself that if she did not insist on asking, he would not have said anything.

However, the anger and sensitivity meant that his conclusion was true. Chen Changsheng suddenly thought that perhaps he could use this matter in exchange for the chance to leave. He waited for Nanke's sharp and angry voice to gradually die down, then very sincerely said, "I don't know whether the spies you demons have placed in the capital have grasped who my teacher was. If you do know, then you should also know that my medical skills are not bad."

Nanke's eyes were exceptionally cold, like she was looking at a dead man. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Chen Changsheng mentally adjusted his choice of words so that even a demon could understand, then continued, "There's a problem with your bloodline. If it is not quickly treated, then when the divine soul within you awakens for the second time,

there is a very high possibility of a backlash. Even if you manage to protect your life, it's very probable that you will end up as an imbecile."

Nanke's face paled. Perhaps it was from the aftershocks of last night's battle, or perhaps it was because of his words. Yet her voice was still cold and indifferent. "I don't know what you're talking about."

As a Demon Princess and Black Robe's only disciple, even if the Garden of Zhou was annihilated before her eyes, her expression would probably not change in the slightest. But she was still young, so even if she thought she had concealed her true emotions superbly, she did not know that Chen Changsheng, her two maids, and even the zither-playing old man had heard a problem in her words.

If Chen Changsheng's words had no influence on her, then why did she repeat the same phrase twice? Her Highness was ill? And it seemed like a very troublesome disease? The faces of the two maids grew deathly pale as they thought to themselves, if we know this secret, what sort of consequence will this incur? The zither-playing old man's face grew rather unsightly.

Chapter 290 - If Life Could Be Like The Moment When We First Met (Part Three)

Seeing Nanke's response, Chen Changsheng became even more confident in his conclusion. As he had already begun speaking, Chen Changsheng wanted to finish his words. At some point in time, he had even begun to consider himself as a doctor and found himself incapable of accepting a sick person's refusals. Even though she was an enemy and he was by far in an inferior position, Chen Changsheng felt obliged to help her.

"I'm extremely experienced in problems caused by the bloodline. I think that you would know as well. If you allow me to treat your disease, I may be able to find a way to cure it." He looked at Nanke as he spoke.

The first time the continent had heard of his name was not due to his engagement to Xu Yourong, nor was it due to the Ivy Festival, and also was not because of the Grand Examination, but because he became Luoluo's teacher. The reason why he became Luoluo's teacher and earned the tacit approval of the Saint couple in the distant White Emperor City, was because he had solved the problem in Luoluo's meridians, allowing her to successfully cultivate by human methods. Zhexiu had journeyed from the distant snowy plains to the capital and took part in the Grand Examination, not because he could enter the Mausoleum of Books and view the monoliths, but because he had heard rumors of Chen Changsheng's skills and wanted him to treat his illness. These two facts were proof that his medical skills were specialized in this area.

Nanke's problem concerned the awakening of her blood. Although it was different from Zhexiu's and Luoluo's problems, there were many similar points. She stared at Chen Changsheng, paying no attention to the thoughts of the subordinates behind her. After a moment of silence, she suddenly spoke, "If... I really am ill, then if you can treat me, I will let you go."

Chen Changsheng thought to himself that even now, she was still unwilling to let the white-clothed girl go. Just who was she? Of course, Chen Changsheng would never accept such conditions, and said in reply, "If I approach you, you'll definitely kill me, so the most feasible way is treating your illness after I leave the Garden of Zhou."

Nanke replied, "For what reason should I believe you? After you leave the Garden of Zhou, you'll definitely return to Li Palace, and I certainly won't be able to find you there."

Chen Changsheng did not hesitate as he replied. "If I promise you, I will naturally respect that promise."

In a world of mutual deception, in the face of this bloody enmity between humans and demons in which all methods were acceptable, keeping a promise was the most absurd matter. Yet, for some reason, as Nanke glanced at Chen Changsheng's calm expression, she felt that his words were incomparably sincere; she could not help but believe in Chen Changsheng's words.

This sort of feeling caused her to feel rather uncomfortable. Nanke questioned unhappily, "For what reason should I believe you?"

She once again repeated her words, however, this time, Nanke finally realized that something was amiss. A strand of anger appeared in her dull eyes. Attempting to conceal her true emotions, she questioned in a flat manner, "For what reason should I believe you? Are you saying that you would only need a glance to tell see that I am ill!?"

This was the third repetition. Chen Changsheng sincerely replied, "Yes, I only needed a glance."

Nanke turned blank as the anger in her eyes scattered, leaving behind only dullness. "How did you see it?"

Chen Changsheng pondered for a moment, then said, "Your problem is different from Princess Luoluo's and Zhexiu's. Their problems mainly had to do with conflicts between the blood vessels and the meridians, while you... Your problem is due to a conflict between the divine soul and the body. From your name, it would seem the divine soul within your body should be the reincarnation of a peacock? The peacock has always been known for its powerful divine soul, which is why it is called the Great Brilliant King. Since you inherited its divine soul and blood, your innate comprehension should be extremely powerful. At a young age, its divine soul within you awoke and began to incessantly thrive and grow, far surpassing the state of your body. It's impossible for the soul and the body to be in harmony with each other, gradually giving birth to conflict. This is the source of your problem."

Nanke was silent for a moment, then asked, "I want to know how

you managed to see it."

"The divine soul resides in the sea of consciousness, however, the divine soul of the Great Brilliant King is your body's second soul, therefore, it resides in a place that we doctors call the 'pine cone'."

Chen Changsheng pointed at the space between his eyebrows as he continued, "When the peacock's divine soul awakened and grew incessantly, it caused your pine cone to grow larger and larger, however, your body was unable to keep up; it was extremely easy to tell that compared to the normal person... or the normal demon, that your brow is somewhat wider. Moreover, every morning and night you perform meditative self-introspection, at this time your mind will connect with the peacock soul, causing a very special symptom..."

He pondered on how to describe this symptom, and after a long period of time, he recalled a phrase which would accurately describe the situation. He said to Nanke on the shore, "The reason why I could tell that you were ill at first glance is because you are... cross-eyed."

Cross-eyed?

Cross-eyed!

It was quiet all around the patch of reeds, especially on the shore, where a deathly silence lingered. Whether it was the two maids or the zither-playing old man, their faces were extremely unsightly. They looked at Chen Changsheng as if they were looking at a

corpse.

Nanke's expression was still calm, even a little stupefied. However, for some unknown reason, even though there was clearly no wind, the hair that spilled over her shoulders had begun to float in the air. Her eyes began to glow dark green. Matched with the childish air that had not yet retreated, her somewhat wide face seemed incomparably strange and horrifying.

At the peak of Sunset Valley, when Xu Yourong saw Nanke for the first time, she had also been as astonished as Chen Changsheng. It was not just because the legendary Nanke was a little girl with a wooden expression, but more because her brow was much wider than normal and her eyes were rather dull. She looked similar to a person whose intelligence had yet to fully develop, moreover, her eyes seemed to lean towards the center.

Xu Yourong had said nothing, because she considered Nanke to be an opponent worthy of her respect. To comment on the body of your opponent was an incredibly discourteous matter.

Chen Changsheng had always been a person that placed an emphasis on manners. Even if he were facing an enemy like the demons which he would possibly engage in battle with, he would never purposefully make fun of his opponent's deformities. There were several reasons why he had directly told Nanke she was cross-eyed. The first was that he knew that she was not actually cross-eyed. This was a sign of the conflict between her body and the divine soul. It was a symptom and not a deformity, so he believed it was okay to say. The second reason was that right now he regarded Nanke as a patient. As a doctor, of course he would be as

forthright as possible; he truly had no bad intentions, nor did he realize that the phrase 'cross-eyed' represented such a humiliation to this little girl. However, it was precisely these honest and sincere words that seemed so trustworthy and believable which caused Nanke to boil with anger.

Only when he saw Nanke's strange green eyes and floating black hair did he realize that he had made a mistake. He hurriedly gestured and tried to explain, "Of course I exaggerated too much, your brow is only a little wider than normal, and when the eyes are influenced by the divine soul, they will innately be drawn closer to the center, making it seem a little dull, but of course there is absolutely no problem with your intelligence."

Worthy of being the Orthodox Academy's honest and reliable little dandy, with this explanation, he was better off with no explanation.

Nanke's expression was still as cold as ever, but her hair began to dance around her while her breathing grew increasingly rough.

There were several harsh shrieks.

Without any warning, she lifted her right hand and pointed it at Chen Changsheng. Five rays of green light pierced through the air, hurtling towards Chen Changsheng's stomach!

Those five rays of light contained the source of her power, carrying the cold and ruthless divine soul which rested between her eyebrows, the incomparably powerful and terrifying Peacock

Plume!

After last night's violent battle, she had been severely lacking in true essence. Like Xu Yourong, she had also lost a large amount of blood. In this situation, for her to unsparingly utilize such an attack could only mean that she had truly gone crazy with anger. She no longer cared about any illness. The only thought in her mind was this to kill abominable human youth in front of her.

Although Nanke had yet to recover from her injuries, this sort of attack was still not something that Chen Changsheng could receive, let alone the fact that he was even worse off than Nanke at the moment. It was a good thing that the Black Dragon sleeping in the lake outside his Ethereal Palace was constantly releasing Black Frost Qi that assisted him in healing the wounds on his internal organs. Most importantly, the ice that fell from the lake helped him recover some of his true essence.

The true essence was still rather sparse, insufficient to do battle, however, it enabled him do something else. With a thought, the thin layer of ice over the wasteland was ignited. Simultaneously, there was a burst of metal clashing sounds. The Yellow Paper Umbrella instantly appeared in his hands, showing off in the wind.

Currently, around the quiet patch of reeds, there was not the slightest breath of wind. The wind that the umbrella welcomed naturally came from those five terrifying Peacock Plumes.

With several terrifying successive bursts, the surrounding reeds were turned into a fine dust, scattering to the sky and the shore, seeming just like a cloud of exploding snow.

The five Peacock Plumes made no distinction between first and last. They violently and simply exploded against the surface of the Yellow Paper Umbrella. Chen Changsheng had simply no way of standing straight. Using the last of his true essence, he held onto the umbrella for dear life. His feet left the reeds as he was sent into the sky, flying several dozen zhang. At the termination of the arc, he heavily fell into that plain.

Utilizing the Yellow Paper Umbrella, he was able to somewhat slow his speed of descent, however, his fall was still not light. As he fell in the water, he produced a big splash.

Just like the pools of reeds at its perimeter, underneath this boundless plain of weeds were countless concealed pools of water.

The moment the chilly water struck his face, he felt as though he had collided against a solid rock. This massive shock almost caused Chen Changsheng to vomit blood, but he managed to force it back down.

He laboriously stood up from the water, unable to deal with his newly-opened wounds. Dragging his even heavier legs, he began to run forward.

Being struck by Nanke's tyrannical and terrifying Peacock Plumes and flying into the plains, this was something that he had already prepared for. Whether it was the angle or position, there was not the slightest deviation. In other words, he had originally been prepared to escape into these plains. Although everyone knew that

entering this enigmatic and dangerous plains meant that there was no going back, he had no choice but to enter.

Because if he did not enter this plain, he would die. If he entered, he would be able to survive for a while longer, even if it was only a few breaths more.

The sky would occasionally rumble with a mournful shriek as Nanke's terrifying attacks persisted.

He did not turn around to glance back at the shore. This had nothing to do with something like 'true men don't look back as the building collapses'. He only wanted to save time and escape as quickly as possible.

The water in the plains was not deep, barely passing his waist. It was just that walking through it was extremely difficult and exhausting. Even if he wanted to go faster, he could not do so.

In order to avoid the patch of water weeds in front of him, he turned his head. As he gazed at the unconscious white-clothed girl on his back, he was somewhat puzzled. He thought to himself that she clearly was not very tall, why was she so much heavier than he had imagined?

Chapter 291-If Life Could Be Like The Moment When We First Met (Part Four)

As she stood on that patch of reeds and stared into the boundless plain, Nanke's face did not divulge the slightest emotion. Her eyes were as indifferent, even dull, as was customary for her. Only that pair of trembling hands hanging by the edge of her skirt indicated how weak she was, as well as how angry Chen Changsheng's successful escape had made her.

In the space above the plain, dozens of white scars could still be seen. These were the aftermath of those tyrannically powerful Peacock Plumes almost tearing through space. In such a short amount of time, she had actually successively launched so many attacks against Chen Changsheng. It was no wonder that her face was so pale, given how much true essence she had expended.

If this were a normal situation, Chen Changsheng, separated from her by only several dozen zhang, would have been turned into finely ground meat long ago. But within the most mysterious plains of the Garden of Zhou, there would surely be some unpredictable peculiarities. It was very obvious that the empty space in the area was warped. It was impossible to accurately link what was seen from outside the plain with the truth. Her attacks had not even been able to brush against Chen Changsheng's sleeves.

The wind blew across that sea of grass and those patches of reeds, making her hair even more disheveled, just like her mind. Her chest rose up and down, her breathing very rough. Looking at her from behind, it was easy to see that she was on the verge of

exploding, or perhaps in the midst of calming down after an explosion. The zither-playing old man had nothing to say, while the two maids did not even dare to make the slightest sound.

"I want to go in." Nanke suddenly said, her childish face indicating that she would brook no opposition.

Of course, this was because she knew that this decision would absolutely bring about protest, even if these were her most faithful subordinate and most fearful servants.

Just as expected, the old zither-player was greatly alarmed by her words and said without any hesitation, "Absolutely not."

Nanke raised her brows and asked impatiently, "And why not?"

The zither-playing old man turned his gaze to that seemingly delightfully lush and beautiful plain and replied somewhat nervously, "From the day the Garden of Zhou opened, no one has ever been able to emerge from those plains."

Nanke impassively replied, "Those are other people, not me."

The old man refused to back down and said, "Even Her Highness, in the face of these plains, is nothing special."

Nanke held up her right hand, brushing at the black curtain in front of her. She stared at those faint life lamps as they leapt about the curtain as she said, "If we're discussing knowledge of the

Garden of Zhou, in this entire continent, no one surpasses my teacher. With Teacher's assistance, I have the means to exit from the plain."

At these words, the old man was forced to ponder in silence for a moment. This plan of the demons involving the Garden of Zhou primarily relied upon Black Robe's understanding of the garden. Before this, who could have imagined that there existed another gate into the Garden of Zhou besides the main gate? And who would have thought Black Robe controlled that gate? As they followed the life lamps to locate those youthful human geniuses that were their targets, they understood more and more about the arrangements that Black Robe had made, and the old zither-player's reverence for him grew ever deeper, and the more he felt that Black Robe was unpredictable. He found himself unable to refute Nanke's words, and even began to somewhat believe in them.

"Only—why must you enter the plains? Xu Yourong and the other three have all already entered the plains, and it's impossible for them to come out."

"Xu Yourong is together with Chen Changsheng. This makes me feel uneasy. Don't forget, one of them is the reincarnation of the Heavenly Phoenix, while the other went from not knowing how to cultivate to the upper level of Ethereal Opening in only a year's time. All of mankind regard their existence as miracles. Who knows? Perhaps if they work together, they really might produce some sort of miracle. I want to go in so that if they really do manage to produce a new miracle, I will be there to personally stamp it out."

Nanke silently thought to herself, especially Chen Changsheng, he must die.

Seeing how firm her resolution was, the zither-playing old man said no more. With a sigh, he took down the zither that he had just finished repairing this morning and began to play a tune.

As the song of the zither made its way into the plain, from within those weeds which were higher than a man, a faint beeping sound could be heard, though what produced it was a mystery.

This old man had originated from the Candle Shadow Shaman tribe and was skilled in attacking and controlling spiritual beings. Up to a certain extent, the sound of his zither could even control, or at the very least send away, monsters of a low rank. Although it was impossible for it to have any effect on those truly powerful monsters, it made walking through this plain much easier. Black Robe naturally had this in mind when he had arranged for him to enter the Garden of Zhou with Nanke.

Much of Nanke's confidence came from this, from her absolute faith in her teacher. She was also fearful of this vast and unfathomable plains, which is why in the very beginning, when she had been pursuing Xu Yourong, and even when she was confronting Chen Changsheng just now, she had always controlled her emotions. It was all because she did not want her human opponents to believe that they had been pushed to the brink and flee into the plains. However, now, Chen Changsheng had already carried Xu Yourong inside.

The tune played by the zither was not only expelling those

monsters, it was also a summoning. Not long after, with a set of heavy footsteps, Liu Wan'er and Teng Xiaoming with pot and pole arrived. Towards this Demon General couple, Nanke's expression was clearly much more respectful. She slowly made clear to them her resolution.

The Demon General couple was silent for a while, then they used their continued silence to indicate their consent. Accompanied by the gentle tune of the zither and the soft parting of the water, the party of demon experts parted the reeds and entered the plain. This boundless plain was no forest, but with regards to this pursuit and battle, with regards to the hunter and the hunted, they would be facing the same dangers.

There were many legends about the vast and unfathomable plains, but bas nobody that had entered this plain had ever lived to tell the tale, the legends were naturally taken with a grain of salt. Moreover, the vast majority of the stories were simply too preposterous—only those that had actually walked into those plains would actually know what lay within, just as how only when one personally tasted the pepper would one know that it was not poison and that the feeling of burning afterwards was not actually fire.

Carrying Qi Jian, Zhexiu had already walked through these plains for one day and one night, but they still did not have a vivid picture of this place. They only knew that in front of their eyes was grass, behind was grass, everywhere was grass. Only when day broke did they realize that the solid ground beneath was gradually growing sparse and those pools of water under the grass were gradually growing more numerous, the soil likewise growing increasingly soft.

The plains were gradually turning into a wetland. Walking through this environment would become increasingly strenuous. Although there were not many mosquitoes, the number of monsters concealed in the grass increased copiously. Just as the morning sun completely illuminated the wetland, a group of monsters could no longer resist the allure of a fresh-blooded meal. They ignored the powerful aura exuded by Zhexiu and attacked them.

For a moment, bits of grass were sent flying and the pools of water were dashed into countless golden leaves while the blood of monsters was continuously spilt. Only after several monster corpses were strewn across the ground was that group of monsters finally compelled to turn tail.

Zhexiu used his hand to cut down grass, gathering it into a heap atop the wet ground. After helping Qi Jian sit down, he sat down cross-legged and began to meditate and harmonize his breathing. From the beginning of this battle to the end, he had been the only one fighting. It was out of the question to say that it had exhausted him, but the poison of the Peacock Plume being suppressed under his eye by his true essence seemed to once again corrode his sea of consciousness, so he had to take care of it.

Qi Jian leaned against the somewhat stiff grass, his face pale, as he looked at the pitch-black corpse of a scaleless snake, larger than a house beam.

His injuries were severe. Liang Xiaoxiao's ambush by the lakeshore yesterday had been too fierce. Not only had he pierced

through his abdomen, he had even more treacherously transmitted true essence through his sword and snapped two of his extremely important meridians, while also leaving behind a wound upon his internal organs that was far too difficult to heal. Although the bleeding had lessened, it still continued to bleed.

Having suffered such a severe injury, he could not even stand, let alone engage in battle. He could only be carried by Zhexiu as he walked, only look on as Zhexiu staved off those terrifying monsters, fighting, shouting, silently, painfully. This fact made him feel very uncomfortable. He felt like a piece of trash. Zhexiu was blind at the moment, and yet he still had to protect him.

After who knows how long had passed, Zhexiu woke up. Without opening his eyes, he slowly shifted his body over to Qi Jian's side. It was obvious that after one day and one night, he had gotten used to the fact that he could not see. He grasped Qi Jian's wrist and listened to the pulse, subsequently producing a pill from his bosom and placing it in Qi Jian's mouth.

Because he could not see, when he was giving the medicine, his finger brushed against Qi Jian's lips.

Qi Jian's lips were somewhat dry and there were even some cracks in the skin caused by thirst and dryness, but they still felt rather soft. This made Zhexiu's figure stiffen, and he rather abruptly said, "Everything would be fine if Chen Changsheng was here."

This was an attempt to make conversation, but Qi Jian didn't understand and asked, "Why?"

Only then did Zhexiu realize that Qi Jian did not care that Zhexiu's finger had brushed against his lips. After a pause, he replied, "His medical skills are superb. Even if he couldn't cure me of the poison within me, he would be able to heal your wound."

Qi Jian was rather curious about the Orthodox Academy, but this was clearly not the time for conversation. After giving his agreement, he said no more. Only by not speaking could he put all his time and energy into recovering his strength and true essence.

Zhexiu understood his meaning and closed his eyes, returning to his meditation—only this time he was sitting next to Qi Jian. Qi Jian only needed to open his eyes to see a profile of his face.

Over the course of this journey, he had already slept for far too long, even to the extent that he had even forgotten to give Zhexiu directions. Of course, in this boundless plain in which forwards and backwards had no meaning, there truly wasn't a need for direction. Nevertheless, he had slept for far too long, so even though he was very weak, he did not want to rest and did not want to close his eyes.

He opened his clear and bright eyes and calmly gazed at Zhexiu's profile. Who knew what he was thinking, but the more he looked, the more entranced he became.

Zhexiu was born with a very ordinary appearance, and there nothing surprising about his face. Besides indifference and a lack of emotions, there was nothing special about his face. He seemed

just like a thin and weak human youth. But who could possibly imagine that his thin and weak body actually concealed a terrifying strength and an unimaginably tenacious will? Especially when he transformed, he possessed a dread that far surpassed his cultivation.

Watching him, Qi Jian's small face was filled with admiration.

Chapter 292 - If Life Could Be Like The Moment When We First Met (Part Five)

The entire continent knew that as the last disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect's Sect Master, Qi Jian's cultivation was incredibly high despite his youth, and his thin and weak body similarly possessed a powerful strength. But during this entire journey, he had clearly realized that in terms of strength of will and true battle prowess, he was far below this wolf youth.

Within this generation of young cultivators, wolf youth Zhexiu's name was very famous, not any weaker than that of the Divine State's Seven Laws, and even sometimes overshadowing it in radiance. The reason why as proud a person as Tang Thirty-Six had placed Zhexiu on par with Xu Yourong as someone that might truly surpass her was because... he had lived in the snowy plains for so many years and directly confronted the demons.

In those years when Zhexiu was very young, he still had not broken into Ethereal Opening, nor did he have the protection of any sect or teacher. And yet under the cover of the wind and snow, he ceaselessly hunted down and killed demons. That he had survived up to now was because of this fact, and this was sufficient to illustrate just how extraordinary he was. In the Mount Li Sword Sect, Qi Jian would often discuss this matter with his seniors, but none of them could understand how he had lived for so long.

Before Zhexiu appeared in the capital to participate in the Grand Examination, the common people thought of this wolf youth only as cold and good at killing. They believed that these were the most important reasons for why he had been able to live up until now.

Only after entering the Garden of Zhou and escaping alongside him did Qi Jian finally understand how Zhexiu had been able to survive in those snowy plains for so long. Because Zhexiu truly lived his life like a wolf.

Within this world, there were countless powerful monsters, as well as mystical and lofty beings like dragons. In describing the wolves that lived upon the plains, whether it was in terms of strength or blood, there was nothing special about them. However, wolves were the most patient of this world's creatures, the most persistent, the most cautious, and the most sensitive to danger. The wolf demi-human tribe possessed the blood of the wolf, so they naturally possessed these characteristics as well.

Zhexiu was a mix of human and wolf demi-human blood. He had been expelled from his clan as a child, and so had sadly lost the feared collective fighting power of the wolf pack. Because of this, he had been forced to push his ability to fight alone to an unimaginable level. His instinct for danger had even surpassed the calculations the priests of the Orthodoxy made with their Fated Star Plates.

As he looked at Zhexiu's face, Qi Jian's emotions became increasingly serious and uncomfortable. He thought to himself that if he did not need to save him, no matter how strong the Demon General couple were, he still probably would have been able to find an opportunity to escape. There was no way he would be in his present predicament, blinded by the Peacock Plume and forced to enter the plains of death.

"I'm sorry..." He withdrew his gaze and looked at the front lapel

on his shirt that had been personally sewn by his master's wife, then whispered, "It's all because I've been such a burden on you."

Zhexiu's eyes were closed in meditation. It was like he was sleeping, as if he had not heard those words.

This made Qi Jian feel even more uncomfortable, and yet it also consoled him somewhat, because he knew that Zhexiu had definitely heard it.

Yet just as he thought Zhexiu would continue his silence, he suddenly heard a voice. "Since you understand this, remember to pay extra when we get out."

It really did seem like Zhexiu was sleeping, like he did not say the words himself. It was just that the corners of his lips were slightly perked up like he was smiling.

For a battle in those dangerous snowy plains, an expressionless face served as the best mask, so he rarely ever smiled, and there were few people that had ever seen his smiling face.

There was no battle right now and he could not see anything, so not even he knew that he had begun to smile.

Seeing his smile, Qi Jian was at a loss for words. He vigorously nodded his head, made a small noise to signal his assent, then happily smiled as well.

Only it was impossible for this smile to persist, because they were still in the plains. As the sun rose higher and higher over the plains, their mood quickly grew downcast.

The Garden of Zhou already had a history of several hundred years. At least a dozen groups and countless human Ethereal Opening cultivators had come to this place. Enticed by the legacy of the continent's supreme cultivator, urged on by the legends of the Sword Pool, who knows how many cultivators had ventured into these plains? And yet none of them had come out alive.

Those previous cultivators were not necessarily weaker than Zhexiu in terms of cultivation, strength, or will.

After they had entered the plains, they had only encountered a few groups of monsters. It was very obvious that the true dangers of this plain had not yet revealed themselves. However, they had already begun to notice many oddities. In these so-called Plains of the Unsetting Sun, the sun truly did not sink below the horizon. When, according to the flowing water bottle, it was night, the sun would turn into a halo of light and slowly make its way around the perimeter of the plain.

Moreover, the plains' space was warped and there seemed to be some special rules for moving within it, and yet even with careful examination, it had been impossible to grasp them. Adding on that green grass that stretched as far as the eye could see, there was simply no such thing as direction in this place. Since there was no direction, it also naturally meant that there was no exit. Those people that entered this plain would seem to have walked amongst it forever, encountering increasingly numerous and increasingly

stronger monsters, until the day finally came where their strength ran out and they died.

The problem was compounded by the fact that it was difficult for him to move because of his severe injuries, and Zhexiu could not see anything. Just how long would they be able to hold out?

Qi Jian lowered his head to look at that round bloodstain on his abdomen and his mood grew even more downcast. Depressed, he said, "I still don't understand why."

Zhexiu knew that what he did not understand was not the plains, but the human heart.

The disciples of the Inner Sect of the Mount Li Sword Sect were all extremely close to each other. Under the guidance of Qiushan Jun and Gou Hanshi, they were like a family. Qi Jian, as the youngest of the Divine State's Seven Laws, was even more cherished. Deep within his heart, he had also regarded his seniors as if they were his elder brothers. And yet who could possibly imagine that the Third Brother Liang Xiaoxiao, who looked after him the most back in Mount Li Sword Sect, would actually pierce him so fiercely with his sword at the lakeshore?

Liang Xiaoxiao's attack had thrust through his abdomen and snapped several of his meridians, but it had even more broken his heart. From yesterday until now, even when his mind was still in a daze from his injuries, he had always been thinking about a question. He wanted to ask his Third Brother, just why did you do all this?

In that grass hut in the Mausoleum of Books, Zhexiu had personally seen how close the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect were, and even how much those people cherished and cared for Qi Jian. So he could understand Qi Jian's current emotions, and clearly empathize with his frustration, confusion, and discomfort. But he did not know how to console Qi Jian. After a moment of silence, he said, "I don't know why he wanted to kill you, nor do I understand the relationship between you and your fellow disciples, because from the earliest moment I could remember, I was alone. I don't think everything in the world requires a reason; I care more about the result. So you must remember, he wanted to kill you, which means that he is your enemy. He is no longer your senior."

Zhexiu was famous and his story had been discussed all across the continent. Many people knew that he was a mix of human and wolf demi-human and that he was expelled from his tribe as a child. They knew that he had lived a hard and lonely life in the snowy plains. Qi Jian lifted his head up to him and suddenly felt that his figure seemed rather lonely and very pitiful. For a moment, he forgot his own troubles and was filled with sympathy and pity for this wolf youth. He subconsciously reached out his hand and grabbed Zhexiu's sleeve.

Qi Jian didn't know why he had done this. He said, "It's different now."

Zhexiu tilted his head slightly, with his eyes closed as he asked, "And what's different?"

Qi Jian thought to himself, right now I'm sitting next to you, so

you're not alone anymore. But because of shame and nerves he couldn't say it, so instead he said, "Because...you've entered the Orthodox Academy?"

Zhexiu thought to himself, that black bear truly had invited me to enter the Orthodox Academy, but I didn't respond.

The reason he had journeyed from the distant snowy plains, come to the capital, and attended the Grand Examination was because he had heard that Chen Changsheng had solved Luoluo's problem of a demi-human attempting to cultivate with human methods. The problem had some overlap with his problem. As he grew older and his cultivation got higher, his blood would grow stronger and the Tide Rush of Blood would continue to increase in frequency. At any time he could die, so he needed Chen Changsheng to help cure his illness so that he could continue to live.

If Chen Changsheng really could treat his illness, he would naturally leave the capital and return to the plains. But those were all matters for the future. Right now in front of Qi Jian, he didn't say that now that they were trapped in these Plains of the Unsetting Sun, it was highly possible that there would be no future. Why make this heavily wounded fellow even more uncomfortable? So he said, "The Orthodox Academy... right, it's just that little princeling called Tang is a little annoying, so I haven't decided yet."

"Yeah, I also think Tang Tang is very annoying, but Chen Changsheng isn't bad. Now that I mention it, in the guest courtyard of the Li Palace, we would sometimes discuss how—if

not for that engagement—maybe our Mount Li Sword Sect could get along with your Orthodox Academy. We could be friends with Chen Changsheng, and you... you could be friends with me."

Qi Jian softly said this as he looked at Zhexiu's face, his voice getting lower and lower. Yet the sun above the plain continued to rise higher and higher, and the air gradually began to grow warm. The pools of water began to emanate more steam, making the atmosphere stuffy. Qi Jian's hands began to sweat, because of anxiety or something else, and then the medicine began to take effect. He began to feel dizzy and drowsy.

His mind was dazed and his vision blurred, but he suddenly saw that Zhexiu had suddenly gotten closer and grabbed his hands. He did not know what Zhexiu planned to do, but he subconsciously felt nervous and even a little fearful. Yet for some reason, he did not have the slightest thought of resisting.

Zhexiu was prepared to take advantage of the medicine's effect to spread medicine over Qi Jian's wound. Because his two eyes could not see, he could only use his hands to feel. His two steady hands made their way up Qi Jian's arms, arriving at his shoulders. Then he made his way down to the abdomen, his hands separated by an inch from Qi Jian's body, not touching it at all. Then they went below the abdomen and rested upon Qi Jian's belt.

The apparel of the Mount Li Sword Sect was very concise, even simple. The belt had no complicated design upon it, but the buckle was very sturdy.

Under Zhexiu's steady hands, an even sturdier buckle would not

have lasted any longer. In a flash, the belt had been unbuckled and the clothes were raised.

Qi Jian was extremely nervous, but his mind was still in a daze. With the drowsiness brought on by the medicine, he lacked even the strength to shout. His body began to slightly tremble.

Zhexiu opened his lapel, revealing the pure white skin to the azure sky of the Garden of Zhou.

He could not see it, but he could feel it.

Qi Jian's body trembled out of shame, anxiety, and anger.

His hands also began to tremble, as he had surprisingly felt that the truth had come to light.

Qi Jian was shamed beyond belief. He tightly closed his eyes, his eyelashes incessantly winking as he wished with all his might that he would not fall unconsciousness like this.

Then, he fell unconscious.

Chapter 293 - If Life Could Be Like The Moment When We First Met (Part Six)

After who knows how long had passed, she woke up.

When she awoke, she realized that her clothes had already been put back, her belt fastened once more. The clothes were cleaned up extremely well, with not even a speck of grass on them. There was not even any evidence of last night's escape upon them. She could clearly feel bandages underneath her clothes, and she did not know how the wound had been treated, but the pain had been greatly alleviated. She even felt that she could perform some small movements.

She opened her eyes wide, looking at her bosom, and felt where the bandages were applied. As she imagined the scene that had occurred previously, her expression became somewhat blank.

After a while, she began to strenuously look around, looking for Zhexiu's figure.

Zhexiu was squatting at the edge of the grass, the place on this piece of solid ground that was the farthest from her. The hem of his clothes had been torn up, causing his two legs to stick out. His posture was rather ugly, making him seem just like a dog.

The torn off hem of his clothes had probably become the bandages wrapped around her abdomen.

She once again looked at her bosom, and for some reason, she felt extremely wronged. She thought to herself, "How could you take off someone's clothes without even asking permission first?"

It was actually truly amazing. Once she no longer needed to conceal her gender, she seemingly began to think like a young lady. For instance, when referring to herself, she used "someone" instead of "I", only it had not become "this one" right away.

The more she thought about it, the more wronged she felt, especially since Zhexiu had not turned around from beginning to end. This made her extremely uncomfortable... and then she began to cry.

Squatting by the edge of the grass and hearing her cry, Zhexiu's back began to tremble.

After a while, he realized why the crying had not stopped. Following the sound, he sat down in front of her and said as soothingly as he could, "Don't cry anymore."

Qi Jian temporarily stopped crying, her small face covered in tears.

Zhexiu paused, then added on, "...or else it will attract more monsters, which is very troublesome."

This was what it meant to have nothing to say but still finding something to say.

Whether adult or youth, in general, men never understood that, in a situation where they had nothing to say but still insisted on saying something, it was the same as turning nothing into something, and also the equivalent of courting an early death.

Qi Jian stared blankly at him, and then began to cry once more. She made sure to not make any sound, which had her seem even more pitiful.

Zhexiu silently pondered on what to do, then explained, "You know that I can't see anything right now, so..."

Without even waiting for him to finish, Qi Jian began to cry even more grievously. She thought with deep discomfort, although you didn't see, this one's entire body was touched all over by you, so are you saying you won't admit it? Could it be that you aren't taking responsibility?

Zhexiu felt his head hurt very much. He had lived for more than ten years, and who knew how many terrifying monsters and demons he had encountered on the snowy plains. He had been through countless life-and-death situations, but... he had never encountered such a situation. He thought to himself, what to do? If she continues to cry like this, what will I do if it affects the wound?

Hearing Qi Jian's sobbing, he was rather restless, and also somewhat confused. He thought to himself, as the last disciple of Mount Li's sect master, your cultivation is so high. At such a young age, you're already at the middle level of Ethereal Opening. Your

swordplay is so strong that perhaps even Guan Feibai isn't even your match. Your skills in comprehension are great, such that at the Mausoleum of Books, you directly read up to the third monolith. No matter how one looks at it, you're extraordinary, so how is it that against all expectations... you would cry?

He did not know how to solve this, so he just silently sat to the side. Little did he know that his response happened to luckily coincide with a famous maxim on man-woman interactions.

The problems of a woman's mood could only ever be solved by the passage of time. In many cases, they simply felt aggrieved and sad and want to cry, so it was for the best to just let them cry. Accompanying them involved offering a handkerchief when necessary or proffering a shoulder when needed, but it certainly did not require sitting on the side with an incessant stream of consoling words. When they still did not calm down and did not feel like talking, anything you did was just making more trouble.

As expected, the crying finally died down. Like a startled bird, Qi Jian lowered her head, and asked a little ashamedly, "You... did you already know?"

This question had two meanings and it was exceptionally difficult to answer—if he had known beforehand, then all those times where their bodies touched afterwards, especially that scene which had just occurred, would incur an even more negative interpretation. Fortunately, Zhexiu was not very good with words, so he maintained his silence—silence had many meanings, so Qi Jian could pick the explanation that made her feel the most comfortable.

In truth, Zhexiu really did not know.

Over the course of their escape, there were a few times, especially when he was carrying her over the mountains and listening to her soft interjections, that he had thought this way, but these were just passing fancies that he did not dwell on much. This was because it was impossible for him to imagine that the last disciple of Mount Li's Sect Master, the most cherished junior of the Divine State's Seven Laws, the young genius who entered the Proclamation of Azure Sky at a mere twelve years old... was actually a girl.

He recalled the scene on the first day in the grass hut back at the Mausoleum of Books, but this time there was naturally a completely different explanation for it. Back then, it was the seven of them living under the same roof. Zhexiu, Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six stayed in the inner room while the four disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect stayed in the outer room. Every day when they slept, Gou Hanshi, Guan Feibai, and Liang Banhu squeezed together while Qi Jian had a space for herself. Crucially, Qi Jian had a blanket for herself. At the time, Zhexiu and Chen Changsheng felt that Gou Hanshi and the rest pampered Qi Jian too much, or that the last disciple of the Sect Master must have had some special status. But now he understood that this was a division between men and women.

What should be done next? Zhexiu was silent while Qi Jian did not know what to say. An awkward atmosphere lingered between this young man and young lady.

Just at this moment, a rumble came from deep within the plains,

closely followed by a thunderous roar. Zhexiu's expression subtly changed as he inclined his ear to listen, confirming that it was some sort of extremely powerful and terrifying monster. He decided that it was not something he could handle, so he took out a powder that would eradicate their scent and scattered it all around them, then just like he had done every other day and night, he went up to Qi Jian then turned around and squatted down.

Over the course of that one day and night, they had repeated this sequence many times. Logically, they should have been very proficient at this, but perhaps because he had learned Qi Jian was a girl, Zhexiu's movements were somewhat stiff, the two hands that were thrust back were rather rigid. He seemed just like a duck that was just about to get cooked.

Seeing this picture, Qi Jian's tears broke into a smile. She lightly patted his back, indicating that he needed to squat a little lower. Then she slowly got on, her two hands very naturally wrapping around his neck.

Maybe it was his mind playing tricks on him, but Zhexiu felt that the feeling from his back was much softer than usual.

A dozen li away, the ground under the grass was constantly bulging and thunderous and terrifying roars came out of it as some strange animal was swiftly advancing forwards. The sun was blazing hot, and its rays penetrated through the grass into those pools of water, revealing the figures of countless monsters. It was like a tide, chasing after the two of them. It was an extremely breathtaking sight.

At the front of this monster tide, Zhexiu and Qi Jian faced the ever-rising and ever-brightening sun, wading through the water all the way. She was still his eyes, and he was still her legs.

"Which direction should we go?"

"In the southwest, there seems to be a big meadow. The ground seems to be higher there, so why don't we go and see? That sound seems to be coming from the east, so you might have go a bit faster."

This conversation's end was followed by a long period of silence, only broken by the sound of feet breaking through the water and splashing it around as the grass gradually grew higher.

After who knows how long had passed, Qi Jian whispered, "Were you really surprised?"

After a moment of silence, Zhexiu replied, "Yes."

She drew closer to his neck, leaned against his shoulders, smelled the familiar scent, and then whispered once more, "What are you thinking?"

Zhexiu did not answer, because he did not know how to answer. Thinking? Thinking about what? About how my fingertips on your slightly shaking body almost slipped once? No, at the moment, that wolf youth's mind was completely blank. He was not thinking about anything.

She thought to herself... did silence mean he's unhappy? After a while, she whispered even more softly, and rather nervously, "Then do you think it was better for me to be a boy or a girl?"

There was no evil motive behind the question, and it went straight to the point.

Zhexiu thought to himself, since yesterday all you did was 'mm' and 'ah' while tightly holding onto me all the way. If you were a man, then it truly wouldn't have been very becoming. Thus, he said, "A girl is better."

Qi Jian felt slightly ashamed, and whispered as softly as a mosquito, "It's always a good thing when women are together, this must be what you mean."

Zhexiu thought to himself, just because it's worse than usual, your conduct is no longer as impressive as it was before, how come?

In this continent, there was a folktale, a story about how a boar demi-human carried his wife on his back.

Yes, whether it was a story or fact, in the vast majority of cases, it should always be the man carrying the woman. It was very hard to imagine the opposite.

So in this vast and boundless plain, Zhexiu carried the young girl

Qi Jian on his back. On the other end of the plains, Chen Changsheng was also carrying a girl on his back.

He had waded through the plains for a long time, and yet he was still in the wetland. The blazing sun illuminated the reeds within the water as well as many unnamed grasses, as if it wanted to turn all plant life into gold and silver carvings. Yet he did not sweat a single drop as his body continued to emit that cold qi, dispersing the scorching heat and resisting the sunlight.

Her eyes closed, Xu Yourong leaned against his back, her eyelashes unblinking, and occasionally she would purse her lips. It seemed that with Chen Changsheng there to serve as a natural pot of cold water, she was sleeping very soundly.

Up until now, there had also been no sign of Nanke's pursuit. Chen Changsheng thought to himself that even the demons would not be willing to adventure into these plains. They had most likely given up, which made him feel somewhat more at ease. As his mind relaxed, his wounds and exhaustion suddenly struck him like a rushing tide. Like sludge, they trapped his two legs, imbuing him with the desire to not take another step forward.

Around him was nothing but grass and wetland with no place to sit down and rest. Chen Changsheng gazed at the grass that was taller than a man as he was forced to continue walking with Xu Yourong on his back. Only this time, he was no longer walking forward, but in a circle, stamping down the reeds and grass all around him. Gradually, a piece of flat ground formed from crushed grass took shape before his eyes.

Under the cover of the surrounding reeds and grass, it was very difficult for people outside to see within, but if there was someone that flew up into the sky and looked down, they would see a little circle about a zhang wide made of grass. Her arms wrapped around her legs, Xu Yourong lay on that pile of crushed grass. She seemed very weak and pitiful, like a newly-conceived child.

Chen Changsheng sat by her side, his head lowered as he examined her face. He gazed at it for a long time, his expression very serious, as though he had just realized something.

Chapter 294 - If Life Could Be Like The Moment When We First Met (Part Seven)

In the early morning, he had woken up in the cave, and the first thing he saw was that bloody and horrifying sight, closely followed by an escape, and then yet another escape. Although they had carried out a few short and simple conversations, in reality, this was the first time Chen Changsheng had the time to closely examine this white-clothed girl's appearance. Perhaps because of the poison or some other reason, this girl's cheeks were somewhat swollen, and yet even this was incapable of obscuring the elegance of her appearance. But even without this swelling, this was only elegance and nothing more—for an ordinary girl, elegance was an excellent descriptor, but since this girl was an elf, elegance indicated only that she was very average.

Like an infant, she hugged her two legs and lied on the grass, on her side. Her long eyelashes were unblinking as though she was in a deep and unwaking sleep, but Chen Changsheng remembered her eyes, remembered the deep impression left upon him by those two eyes in the cave. His eyes were incredibly clear, such that Luoluo and Tang Thirty-Six had once said that you could even see a person's reflection in them. Her eyes were also very clear, but different from his.

Her eyes were like the clear autumn waters, not like the waters of the lake, but an even fainter and clearer color.

Imagine a celadon bowl calmly sitting under the eaves. A fresh spring rain falls upon the world. The rain travels along the eaves and falls down, drip drop, drip drop, gradually transforming into a

song. Not too long after, the spring rain slowly fades away and the sunlight shines brightly and beautifully once more. The bowl sitting under the eaves is the same as ever, except now there is a bit of water in it. This water is colorless, and yet it seems to be imbued with the spirit of spring. It has no flavor, and yet it seems to have been mixed with fresh tea.

Yes, it was like the water in the celadon bowl, clear and light, but not weak.

As he gazed at this sleeping girl, Chen Changsheng wanted her to open her eyes so that he could once again see the water that was like fresh rain over the bare mountains.

Next, he thought of how when they first met in the cave, he had noticed that the limbal rings of her eyes seemed to have been suffused with a strange green flame—if his guess was correct, that was most likely Nanke's poison. The poison of the Peacock Plume was incredibly toxic and incredibly hard to remove. It was no wonder that the elf, who was so close to nature and well-versed in which plants could serve as antidotes, had actually been so weakened by this poison.

Chen Changsheng placed his hand on her wrist to feel her pulse and realized that her meridians were empty. Not even the slightest drop of true essence flowed through them. Even more frightening was that she had clearly lost too much Qi and blood. Her pulse was soft and weak. If this situation persisted, then it was highly likely that she would quietly die in her sleep.

This realization made him very nervous, so he hurriedly tried to

think of a way to stop it. It was just that all of the medicine and food that he had carried with him had all been thrown away as weapons in his battle yesterday. He thought deep and hard, sending his spiritual sense into the sheath. After silently searching for a long time, he finally found a box in that seemingly empty space.

It was the very last box, and it was very heavy. The moment it appeared on the pile of flattened grass, it caused the ground to sink into the water somewhat.

Opening the box, countless bright and eye-catching golden leaves, as well as a box half-full of crystals, appeared before his eyes. On the very top was a thin booklet. Within that booklet were the secrets of the Mount Li Sword Style.

This had been the most direct and most extravagant of the gifts Luoluo had given to pay respects to her teacher.

If the golden leaves and crystals in the box were used to buy a property, he probably could have bought the entire Hundred Flowers Lane very easily.

If he were to destroy the book of secrets of the Mount Li Sword Style, even Qiushan Jun would come to pay him respects out of gratitude.

But within these dangerous plains, the golden leaves and the secrets of the Mount Li Sword Style had no use. He pushed the golden leaves to the side, put back the secrets of the Mount Li

Sword Style, then took out all the crystals in the box. He piled them all up by her side and he walked over to the edge of the pile of flattened grass and stared blankly into the shallow water. What he was thinking, what he wanted to do, no one could tell.

After a while, his right hand pierced into the water.

It was just that his breathing and pulse were already extremely slow, so his actions were also naturally much slower. The movements of his hand could not meet the expectations of his mind. There was a tiny splash of water, but his hand landed on nothing.

Just as he was feeling helpless, he suddenly realized that the water around his arm had formed a thin layer of ice.

In the next moment, he took his hand out of the water. In his fingers, he tightly held a plump water snake. This water snake did not put up the slightest struggle. It was obvious that it had been frozen stiff.

Right now, he did not even have the ability to catch a water snake, but the cold Qi being emitted by his body could help him do some things.

He slowly made his way back to her side, then took out his dagger and chopped the head of the water snake off. He brought its headless body over to her lips and began to pour its blood into her mouth.

Right now, she was not even conscious, so naturally she could not swallow. Inevitably, some of the snake blood flowed out of her lips, creating a rather bloody scene.

After a while, the water snake's blood ran dry. He placed the body of the snake on the side and looked at the girl's face. He took a handkerchief from his sleeve and began to carefully clean her face.

Even at this time, he still adhered to his everyday lifestyle.

The blood of the water snake contained a lot of heat energy, making it the most suitable for enriching one's blood. Adding on that incomparably luxurious pile of crystals by her side, and Chen Changsheng knew that this would at the very least keep her from dying in her sleep.

Only now did Chen Changsheng finally sigh in relief. He sat by her side, gazing at the impenetrable grass surrounding them, and truly began to stare blankly.

Without any medicine, it was impossible for him to directly enrich her blood and it was very difficult to cure her. Moreover, his own situation was also very terrible.

The Black Dragon was sleeping in the lake outside his Ethereal Palace, emitting the coldness of Black Frost, continuously mending the wounds of his internal organs. But this was just treating the symptoms.

Right now, he was very weak, his breathing and heart beat were extremely slow. His situation was very similar to that of a cold-blooded animal shivering before the advent of winter.

This signified that he was about to enter hibernation.

The method the Black Dragon used to save him was exactly that—hibernation.

Hibernation was sleep.

Right now, what he required most was sleep, to sleep for a long time, to sleep until the sky and earth went dark, until the end of time.

But he could not sleep.

Because she was still asleep, so he must stay awake.

This feeling was extremely painful.

Wanting to sleep, but being unable to; how beautiful was this sight? It served as the most effective of punishments. One could imagine how unbearable it was. In order to prevent his heavy eyelids from closing, Chen Changsheng made all sorts of efforts and attempts. He slapped his face, washed his face, and even attempted to gather his spirit. At the end, only when his spiritual sense rested on the black stone did he instantly and truly wake up.

The black stone was placed together with Wang Zhice's notebook in a very remote corner of his little world. If not carefully searched for, it was very easy to miss. Perhaps because of this reason, or perhaps because even at the point of death, he instinctively felt it was too precious. Yesterday, he had not thrown out this black stone and the notebook along with the rest of the items in his bid to escape from the entrapment of those two wings of light.

When he journeyed from Xining village to the capital, returning the marriage contract had never been very important. For him, what was important was the Grand Examination, because only through the examination would he be allowed to meditate in the Pavilion of Ascending Mist for one night. For this reason, he had put forth an unimaginable amount of time and effort, eventually reaching that seemingly inconceivable goal. In comparison to the price he had paid, his gains from the Pavilion of Ascending Mist were rather pitiful. He had not directly found the secret to defy the heavens and change fate. All he had gotten was the black stone and the notebook.

So of course he would place great importance on this black stone and notebook, as he hoped that he would obtain even more things from them. In fact, this seemed to be the case. In the Mausoleum of Books on that night when he was viewing the monoliths, they floated in his sea of consciousness, and yet, no matter how he moved them around, they had been unable to form that piece of starry sky. At that time, the black stone played an extremely important role, allowing him to break into the upper level of Ethereal Opening in one move. Then what about the notebook?

The positions are relative. This was the sentence Wang Zhice

used to open this book, and also the sentence which had left the deepest impression on him.

He gazed at the dense and green foliage of that impenetrable plain, silently comprehending the words. He didn't have any realizations, but he suddenly discovered that yesterday, when he and Zhexiu leapt from that clifftop into that cold pool, they had emerged on the surface of the lake in the end. When he was attempting to escape the pursuit of Nanke's two maids and sank down to the lake bottom, when he had returned to the other side, he had been sent soaring into the night sky in the end... position was relative, and it was also opposite?

Could it be that the world of the Garden of Zhou was not a flat surface, but two opposite surfaces combined together? With that cliff at the uppermost reaches of that river serving as the boundary, those scenic lakes and mountains were one world, while the mountains, rivers, and the plain was another, opposite world. The path between those two worlds, was it that cold pool as well as the pond that was some ten li away from Sunset Valley?

Chen Changsheng silently calculated the extent of this world, but soon after, he thought about why he and Zhexiu had gone over to the world on the other side, and then about how he had come back to the Garden of Zhou's main world... in both cases, it was because of the strand of sword intent. Initially, they had gone in pursuit of the sword intent, but the sword intent was what had brought him out in the end.

Last night in the depths of the lake, just as he was about to die, in that final moment, he had noticed a strange change. How could he

forget it?

He lowered his head to look at the metal ball in his hands, lightly stroking it in thought.

With a slight movement of spiritual sense and a dense collection of metal rubbing and crashing sounds, the Yellow Paper Umbrella suddenly appeared in his hands.

After silently giving it some thought, he stood up and then thrust the umbrella forward.

The Yellow Paper Umbrella gave no response.

He turned his body, slowly moving the umbrella through the air and stirring up a light breeze.

When the umbrella pointed at a direction that he guessed to be the southwest, it suddenly stopped.

It was not because he had made the umbrella stop, rather the umbrella did not want to move anymore. The wind on that pile of grass suddenly disappeared without a trace.

A light and yet very clear shaking moved from the canopy to the spine to the handle of the umbrella, and then to his hand, ultimately transmitting over to his heart.

A strand of sword intent had appeared somewhere far away in that direction.

The sword intent was very elusive, just like the sword intent he had sensed at the cold pool yesterday. However, it was much more intense this time, making him instinctively feel reverential towards it.

This sword intent made no sound. It seemed to have been in that place for countless years, but its appearance was in itself a sort of summoning.

Chen Changsheng thought about how this Yellow Paper Umbrella had violently carried him along in its rush last night and mumbled to himself, "Was this sword intent looking for you?"

After a moment of silence, he looked at the umbrella again and said, "Or is it...that you're supposed to be used to find that sword intent?"

Chapter 295 - If Life Could Be Like The Moment When We First Met (Part Eight)

There was not a single moment in which the space within the plains was not incessantly changing. Other than the monsters that lived within them, intelligent beings that came from the outside would find it very hard to understand the rules that governed these changes. As the old saying went: there cannot be an exit without an entrance. Just as Chen Changsheng was stressing over exactly this, the Yellow Paper Umbrella suddenly pointed in a certain direction—perhaps it was not the best choice, much less the correct one, but it was a path nonetheless. That would always be much better than aimlessly wandering without a destination. It was just like a difficult homework question. No matter how bitterly you racked your brains over it, it still remained unsolved. Suddenly, a classmate of yours gives you an answer. You have no idea of whether he's deceiving you or consoling you, but besides writing this answer upon your paper, what other choice did you have? Notwithstanding the fact that the strand of sword intent truly did exist, for what reason would the Yellow Paper Umbrella hold enmity to him and send him to an early grave?

Chen Changsheng finally decided upon the direction he would walk. Although his body was still weak and drowsiness wrapped around his body like a snake, his mind had been appeased. He sat down by Xu Yourong, leaning against that pile of crystals. He staved off the onset of somnolence as he stared into her eyes, waiting for her to wake up.

After who knows how long had passed, Xu Yourong's eyelashes fluttered and she roused from her sleep. The two transparent pools of water formed by fresh rain over the bare mountains once again

rested on Chen Changsheng's eyes, rendering him speechless. Exactly as it had been in the cave when he had woken up, they were so very close to each other, staring into each other's eyes. However, her eyes had no panic, no shyness, no wariness, much less fear now. There was only calmness.

Her eyes were extraordinarily clear, free of dust and sophistication. They were like the eyes of a newly born infant. On the other hand, the ocular serenity also seemed to allude to having beheld the red dust of the mortal world, to have experienced all worldly things. They seemed like the eyes of an elderly man watching the rain. But these two feelings were not in conflict. When mixed together, they engendered a profound and indescribable charm.

Perhaps because he was too tired, or maybe because her eyes were too enchanting, but Chen Changsheng did not avert his gaze.

Lying on a pile of grass, separated by not even a foot, a young man and a young lady calmly stared into each other's eyes.

However, they could not look into each other's eyes forever. Interestingly, the first one to turn away out of shame, or perhaps nerves, was Chen Changsheng.

He somewhat uncomfortably shifted his gaze, flitting his eyes towards the grass not too far away, and said, "You're awake?"

Of course she was awake. He was merely finding something to say in order to spark conversation. Just like Zhexiu at the other

end of the plains, Chen Changsheng was also rather unskilled at the art of interaction, especially with members of the opposite sex. However, these words truly possessed another meaning.

Xu Yourong softly acknowledged that she was awake.

Chen Changsheng replied, "Let's switch places then."

Xu Yourong slightly raised her brows. "Hm?"

Chen Changsheng said, "You've slept for a long time, so now it's my turn."

When he regained consciousness in the cave, he knew that the girl had saved him. Soon after, she had left him with a few words before sinking into a deep sleep. This had placed immense pressure on him, as if both of their worlds had been placed on his shoulders. Only now when he confirmed that she was truly awake did he finally relax.

Once he gave their two worlds worth of burdens to the awake her, he would finally be able to rest. As soon as he thought of this, exhaustion swept over him like a tide, submerging him from head to toe, filling in every pore, sinking into his muscles and bones, and even his spiritual world. Not waiting for any response from Xu Yourong, he closed his eyes and began to sleep. Perhaps he went as far as to have fainted.

Just like Chen Changsheng in the cave, Xu Yourong was caught

completely off-guard. After staring vacantly at him for a while, she finally broke out of her stupor. With the flattened grass as support, she laboriously sat herself up. Only then did she notice the pile of precious crystals by her side. As she swept her gaze across her surroundings, she realized that she was in the plains. This made her silent for a very long time.

In the end, she had still been forced into these plains. Then was there still a possibility of getting out?

Relying upon her illustrious Dao heart, she expelled these disorderly thoughts from her sea of consciousness and entered into Meditative Introspection. She realized that although her vision was clearer than it had been this morning, Nanke's poison still remained within her body, continuously corroding her body and sea of consciousness. However, the biggest problem was that her bloodline were almost drained.

It was not that she was severely lacking in true essence, although this was also the case, but that she was almost out of blood.

Blood was the basis of all life. Without blood, there was no life. In reality, based on the injuries she had incurred this morning, she should have still been in the grips of unconsciousness and not awake—her body would require more blood to be awake and move around. Since she had awoken, it indicated that her situation had taken a turn for the better.

She saw the remnants of the snake corpse on the grass, and then muttered to herself. She could tentatively guess at what had happened, her gaze at Chen Changseng turning soft. Fellow human

cultivators being chased by demons providing each other support—this was as it should be. Chen Changsheng had already proved through his actions that he was not someone who would abandon his companion, so of course she would have to do her part. She lightly placed her right hand on his pulse.

Chen Changsheng's pulse was mysteriously slow, more than three times slower than that of the average person, and yet its beat was very steady. Although it seemed somewhat weak and disorderly, it gave a completely different feeling from the pulse of a person at their deathbed.

Back then, in the early morning, when they were on the patch of reeds, she had taken his pulse and even made some calculations with her Fated Star Plate. It had been clear that this person was not to live long, so why was he still alive? She pondered this and decided that it had something to do with the pure yin coldness in his body. She gazed at Chen Changsheng and silently thought to herself, the continent really does have hidden dragons and crouching tigers. Even the Snow Mountain Sect, whose glory days are long behind it, could not be underestimated.

Just as she turned her gaze, the grass began to resound with snoring. Because of his heavy injuries and how long he had carried her, and also because he had resisted the Black Dragon's hibernation, Chen Changsheng had long ago been completely exhausted. Now that he could finally relax, he had entered an incomparably sweet and sound sleep. Let alone his thunderous snoring, even if there was actual thunder, it would still be impossible for him to wake up.

From time to time, the soundly sleeping Chen Changsheng would smack his lips, as if he was eating something tasty in his dreams. Occasionally, he would also ball up his fists and stamp his legs, making him seem like a little baby. Xu Yourong could not help but smile at this scene.

However, at this moment, the sound of a zither came from deep within the plains.

Xu Yourong's expression did not change, but a hint of caution appeared in her eyes.

She could not forget that the old zither-player was an elder of the Candle Shadow Shaman Tribe, and what the shaman tribe was most skilled at was manipulating poisons and monsters. Furthermore, the space within the Plains of the Unsetting Sun was warped. She had only been awake for a few moments, but that was all the time needed for her to understand this mystery. Even so, not even warped space could block sound, and, moreover, the monsters hidden within the plains most definitely had some means of moving freely through the plains.

Her eyes, shimmering like mountain dew, rested upon the water, growing cold once the calm surface began to ripple. The shallow ripples seemed like countless insects crawling along the surface of the water as they fanned out in all directions, but there was, in truth, nothing. They were merely the aftermath of commotion from either afar or deep underground..

A strand of condensed spiritual sense followed her sight and was sent into the distance, sweeping through the dense grass and the

thick mud beneath.

Perception had always involved both sides, thus the beings hidden deep within the grass and the ooze clearly sensed her Qi.

It was a Qi from ancient times, grand and noble beyond comparison.

Restless noises arose from far off in the plains, followed by countless rustling sounds. The sources of some of the underground vibrations were also quietly retreating. Xu Yourong's Qi had in some compacted form been sent all around the plains. Many of the monsters who had been stimulated by the zither into hunting for prey had, one by one, made their escape, but... there were numerous monsters who did not change their direction.

Xu Yourong's Qi was, without question, a most noble and powerful Qi, but in her weakened situation, for these monsters, it was also the most delectable.

If at this moment there was someone up in the sky that could look down on the plains, they would see that the grass within the surrounding few dozen li contained the figures of countless monsters. Like a tide, they slowly encircled the place where she and Chen Changsheng were located. And even more chilling was the fact that, despite all these monsters roving about, none of them made a sound.

With a gentle breeze, a pair of snow-white wings appeared behind her back.

While she was sleeping, she had recovered some of her true essence and regained some blood, but now she used them all up without hesitation.

She turned to Chen Changsheng, preparing to extend her hand and grab his belt, but she stopped halfway for some reason.

This circle of several dozen li had already been turned into a battlefield by those countless monsters, but the true danger had yet to rear its head. It lay outside the battlefield, at an even farther place.

The dense grass of the plains cast a dark shadows on the water. The shadows concealed several hundred demon vultures.

Those demon vultures were covered with gray feathers, and their black beaks were even sharper than the average sword.

Even more frightening were the gazes of these demon vultures, cold and merciless, sharp to the extreme. Whether it was a sword or their pointed beaks, neither of them could compare to their gazes.

This species of monster was highly intelligent, its attacks extremely strange, and its flying speed extremely fast. In the outside world, they dwelled in the mountains of the northeast. One demon vulture alone could slay the average Meditation cultivator. Thankfully, the demon vultures were extremely rare on the Eastern Continent. However, who could have imagined that there

would be so many of them in the Garden of Zhou?

There were several hundred demon vultures present, but not a single one moved its wings. All of them stared out into the plains at a particular place, their eyes cruel and thirsty for blood, and their demeanor terrifyingly calm.

From an even farther place came the faint sound of the zither. Amongst the reeds, the grey silhouettes of the vultures seemed sinister beyond compare.

Xu Yourong turned her body, gazing far off into the distance.

She did not know what dangers were concealed out there, nor did she take out her Fated Star Plate, but she knew that taking to the air was not a good choice. She was still severely injured and was incapable of exhibiting her fastest speed, nor could she properly orient herself in this plain. If she chose to fly, there was a high possibility of dying.

The azure sky above the plains seemed vast and limitless, as if she could freely stretch her wings. In reality and on the contrary, it was exceptionally dangerous.

If she were alone, perhaps she would have been capable of successfully escaping, but there was a sleeping youth thunderously snoring away behind her right now.

Chapter 296 - If Life Could Be Like The Moment When We First Met (Part Nine)

Xu Yourong sat back down and took out the Tong Bow and the Wu Arrows, and then lowered her head in silence.

Chen Changsheng slept behind her while countless crystals encircled her.

Time slowly flowed by. The monsters hidden in the grass were slow at the onset, their inborn fear towards her Qi deterring them.

The faint tune of the zither did not grow more frantic, and it did not urge them on. Instead, it grew even calmer, as if placating these monsters.

It soothed the hearts and souls of these monsters, telling them to no longer fear, inspiring them with the courage to overcome their fears.

The surface of the water between the grass suddenly began to fiercely shake. The previous tiny ripples suddenly converged into one, transforming into a towering wave.

The wave rolled across the pile of flattened grass, soaking her knees.

She lifted her head and opened her eyes, staring into the depths

of the water. Then she bent the bow, nocked an arrow, and then slightly loosened her fingers.

Whoosh.

The Wu Arrow flew through the air, piercing deeply into the water.

There was nothing in the water, so what was this arrow being shot at? It could not be the water, could it?

In the next moment, the wave of water suddenly dispersed and the ripples on the surface were becalmed.

It was as though one arrow was all it took for her to calm the waters.

Xu Yourong's Wu Arrow naturally was not aimed at the water, nor was it aimed at the wave, but at the monster that had stirred up the wave.

The limpid water was slowly dyed red.

The corpse of a dragon serpent slowly floated up. Laying across the sea of grass, its corpse seemed as massive as a city wall.

A Wu Arrow was planted between its eyes, buried all the way up to its feathers. In comparison to the massive body of the dragon

serpent, the Wu Arrow was like a thin blade of grass.

However, this diminutive arrow had easily struck down the dragon serpent.

This was not the end, but rather the beginning.

In the next moment, the surface of the water began to fiercely shake. Countless plumes of water arose, and then, accompanied by heart-shaking hisses of anger, dozens of massive figures breached the surface of the water and alighted upon the flattened grass.

Each of those massive figures was one dragon serpent!

Each dragon serpent's head seemed larger than that pile of grass that Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng were on!

Dozens of dragon serpents broke through the surface, obscuring the sky as they descended with astonishing momentum.

The little girl wielding her bow on that pile of grass seemed tiny in comparison.

The dragon serpent was an extremely famous monster on the continent, because its skin could be used to make the finest armor. From this fact alone, one could infer how great the dragon serpent's defensive power was. The seemingly soft and sleek serpent skin was abnormally tough. Not to mention normal weapons, even the strike of an Ethereal Opening cultivator would

find it hard to pierce through such skin.

As the humans, demons, the demi-humans, and other such intelligent beings slowly began to dominate the Eastern continent, the vast majority of dragon serpents slowly began to seclude themselves in the rarely traveled lakes and pools in the wilderness. Despite that, they were still renowned for their ferocity. Who could have possibly imagined that this plain in the Garden of Zhou actually contained so many dragon serpents? Moreover, these dragon serpents made up only a portion of the monsters in these plains.

It was no wonder that, in these past several hundred years, all the Ethereal Opening cultivators who had entered these plains had never been able to survive.

The legends said that the dragon serpents possessed the blood of the dragons, but they suffered from a plight as well. Their souls would never awaken, and they could only live in the water. Perhaps this was the reason why they held the greatest animosity towards the bloodlines of the dragon and the phoenix. This was probably the reason why they had been the first to attack Xu Yourong.

As these dragon serpents struck out, their bodies covered the sky and cast a shadow over the area.

Xu Yourong's quiver only contained a bit more than ten Wu Arrows, so how could these be enough to account for each one of these powerful monsters?

This was a problem, but she swiftly arrived at the solution to this problem. Since there were not enough arrows, then she would not use her arrows.

As those massive figures attacked, they gave off terrifying hisses. She calmly gazed at them and once again drew back her bow, but there was no arrow on the bowstring this time.

Her actions were still as steady as ever, concise without any unnecessary movements. She would not waste a single bit of true essence or strength.

Each time she drew back her bow, it was an exact duplicate of the first time without the slightest difference.

Except for the direction the Tong Bow was pointed at.

Twangtwangtwangtwang~! The bowstring vibrated like the strings of a zither, and the sound it issued formed a most unyielding and monotonous song.

Countless slender white streaks departed from the bowstring and flew through the air, landing on the enormous bodies of the dragon serpents.

The dragon serpents' incredibly sturdy skin, so tough that not even Ethereal Opening cultivators would be able to split it, when touched by these slender white streaks, began to crack open, piece

by piece.

The slender white streaks seemed like they could sunder the air, as though they possessed the ability to rend almost everything.

In an instant, the bodies of those dozens of dragon serpents were densely gorged with bloody wounds, and their blood spilled down like a majestic downpour. Within those wounds, one could make out the twisted dragon flesh and even the dense white bones. It was an incredibly bloody and terrifying sight.

The dragon serpents were in immeasurable pain, their upper halves writhing violently in the air while their lower halves stirred up colossal waves that would shock the heavens.

Those turbid waves touched the skies, and then were followed soon after by the wounded dragon serpents' most frenzied attack.

Xu Yourong sat amidst the grass, her expression serene, unafraid and unawed, indicating that she would not yield. She simply began to fire her bow even faster, the blurring speed of her arms rendering her moves completely unpredictable.

Twangtwangtwangtwang! Several hundred, no, several thousand slender white streaks shot forth from the bowstring, scattering out in every direction from the pile of grass she stood on.

Those dragon serpents could not even approach the pile of grass before they were cut into boulder-sized chunks. The chunks

ricocheted off each other as they plummeted to the surface of the water, filling the sky like a rain of meteors.

With continuous booms, the countless pieces of the dragon serpents splashed into the water, stirring up enormous waves. Only after a long time did the water gradually grow calm once more.

The water had long since been dyed red by the blood of the dragon serpents, but now it began to gradually turn black. It was suffused with an unbearable stench, like a particular cheap and shoddy ink.

When those dozens of massive dragon serpents had covered the sky, it appeared that the heavily injured her had no means to resist, left only with the option of becoming a meal together with the sleeping Chen Changsheng. However, who would have thought that the feeble her only casually drawing back her bowstring would be able to turn those terrifying monsters into a pile of meat chunks?

Of course, even though she had seemed to draw back the Tong Bow very casually, it was in reality extremely tiresome.

Moreover, it still had not ended.

The inky water once more began to shake, creating even more ripples. The ripples crisscrossed everywhere, giving rise to an indescribable design.

The countless monsters concealed in the plains, urged on by the tune of the zither, charged out like a tide into the water.

Xu Yourong glanced at Chen Changsheng, her calm face expressing a little confusion and self-ridicule.

What she was confused about was Chen Changsheng. Her calculations with the Fated Star Plate clearly indicated that his life force had been exhausted, so why was he still alive? It was to the extent that she found it impossible to easily depart. She was also confused about herself. She clearly knew that the youth from the Snow Mountain Sect would die, so why could she not abandon him? Since yesterday night, she could have ignored him at any time, but why did she not?

The self-ridicule was obviously aimed at herself. Back when she was small and lived in the palace, the Empress would often tell her that she was too soft-hearted, stressing that it was 'no good'. Later on, when she moved to the South Stream Temple, the Holy Maiden would often tell her that she was too hard-hearted, and that this, too, was no good. Then was her heart too soft or too hard? Or did her wavering and uncertainty prove Nanke's words of calling her small-minded correct?

Just as she was thinking about these things, the dim sky above the plains suddenly resounded with ear-piercing and strange cries. She raised her head and saw several hundred demon vultures flying over. This time, the sky truly was overshadowed, the demon vultures not letting a single ray of light through. The dimness turned into gloominess. Simultaneously, her eyes became even calmer, so much so that they could even be described as

indifferent.

Chapter 297 - If Life Could Be Like The Moment When We First Met (Part Ten)

The demon vultures were even more frightening than the dragon serpents. They were stronger and moved like lightning, and their attacks were extremely bizarre. In order to survive their attacks from all sides, the best method was not to dodge, but to kill them as fast as possible. Then she would simply have to be even faster than lightning itself, even more abrupt and more berserk than a raging tempest.

She silently and indifferently stared at the sky full of vultures, her two white wings slowly swaying behind her.

Besides dragon serpents and demon vultures, the Plains of the Unsetting Sun most certainly had even more powerful monsters, but she did not save her most powerful attack for that time.

Without any hesitation, a bright flame began to burn within the depths of her eyes, even temporarily suppressing the dark-green poison.

Swishswishswishswish! Countless white feathers flew out from her wings, transforming into countless sharp arrows that shot towards the sky.

The phoenix's Feather Barrage..

As those several hundred demon vultures sensed the sacred Qi

imbued within those white feathers, they scattered with cries of alarm, and the sky became blue once more.

However, those demon vultures would never see that same sky again, because the Phoenix feathers were too swift, even faster than lightning.

The azure sky was lit up by countless points of holy light.

The arrow-like white feathers pierced through the bodies of the demon vultures, slicing through their plumage like sharp knives.

For a moment, the sky was filled with severed beaks and shattered wings while countless sprays of blood bloomed like fireworks in the air.

Xu Yourong cared not, not even sparing another glance towards the sky.

At some point, the crystals surrounding her had begun to emit pure and warm rays of light that incessantly poured into her body.

She calmly looked around her and once again drew her Tong Bow.

The sun of the Plains of the Unsetting Sun would never set, so there was no time of sunset, but there was a dusk. In that period of time, the sun would turn into a disc of light and the light that blanketed the land would grow dim.

At dusk, the entirety of this sea of grass would be dyed red. No matter how shrill or unyielding the tune from the zither was, the monsters all eventually retreated. They had come like a tide, and now they retreated as one as well, disappearing without a trace.

At least several thousand monsters had died in the surrounding sea of grass. The vast majority of the corpses had been taken away by other monsters, sometimes even their own companions, to serve as food. Even so, because so many had died, many monster corpses were still strewn across the sea of grass. The foul blood slowly sank down into the mud, but the bloody foam left behind on the pile of grass by the waves did not disappear.

Murky and slanted rays of light peeked out from the distant horizon of the plains, causing this scene to be even bloodier.

Xu Yourong's face was extremely pale, perhaps because the aftermath of what had happened had been too repulsive, or because of the damage from her injuries.

At the moment, the crystals around her had all turned into fine white dust, no longer containing even the slightest trace of power.

She slowly put down the Tong Bow and dabbed her finger in some of the crystal powder, covering it.. This could at least dispel some of the ache on her finger and treat the cuts inflicted by the bowstring.

Without these crystals, it would have been impossible for her to

push back this monster tide.

In fact, besides the Li Palace, the Imperial Palace, the Holy Maiden Peak, and the Longevity Sect, she had never before seen so many crystals.

This amount of crystals was truly rather ridiculous.

She gazed at the sleeping Chen Changsheng and silently thought to herself: as expected, the Snow Mountain Sect is truly worthy of being known as a sect that had a ten thousand year legacy of accumulation. Moreover, just like that Black Frost Dragon that they were descended from, they truly loved to gather crystals and treasures. This secret disciple of the Snow Mountain Sect was actually able to bring so many crystals with him.

She had already retracted her white wings. It was apparent that she would not be able to spread her wings again for a long time. Right now, she was absolutely exhausted. Her true essence was depleted, and she had lost too much blood. She had truly reached the point where the oil had run out and the lamp guttered. If an enemy appeared, she would die for sure.

It seemed like she did not even have the strength to drag herself to the middle of the pile of grass, nor did she have enough time to untie the longbow from her shoulder. Her arms wrapped around her legs, and she sat at the waterside, allowing that foul-smelling bloody foam to soak the edge of her dress.

When she was at her most desolate; when she needed help the

most; and when she most needed to rest, as if there was some invisible connection between them, Chen Changsheng woke up.

She did not turn around, but she knew that he had opened his eyes. "You're awake?"

Although these were the plains of the Garden of Zhou and not Xining Village's old temple or the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng still customarily, even stubbornly, took five breaths of time to compose himself, and then looked over.

However, when he glanced over at her, he began to feel ruefully apologetic. He realized that he probably should not have wasted the five breaths of time.

Xu Yourong sat at the edge of the grass pile, her arms wrapped around her legs as the bloody foam splashed against her dress. Her figure was extremely lonely and pitiful.

"Yes, I've woken up." Chen Changsheng stood up and walked over to her. He wanted to walk even faster, but the coldness of the Black Frost made his body stiff.

Xu Yourong still did not turn her head, because she was so tired that she did not even have the strength for it. She softly said, "Then let's switch places."

With these words, she slightly leaned her body, holding her two legs and placing her face on top of her knees. Just like that, she

motionlessly fell asleep.

Chen Changsheng walked over to her side and gazed at her tightly-shut eyes and pale white face in silence.

He lightly unfastened her longbow, and then inserted his right arm into the crook of her knee while his left hand supported her back. Lifting her up, he pulled her away from the edge of the grass pile that was covered with bloody foam.

As he did all these things, she did not wake up. Not even her eyelashes moved. When he put her down, she still hugged her legs as she slept.

Some people would be strangers forever, whereas others would seem like old friends from the onset. Although they were strangers that had not exchanged many words and hadn't even exchanged names, they could entrust their lives and possessions to each other.

You only needed to see what sort of person they were, see how much trust they placed in you, and then you would be willing to place some trust in them in return.

Right up until now, they had always been together but had not said much to each other. However, when he woke up, she was able to relax and fall asleep. On the other hand, once she woke up, he could likewise snore away like the thunder. At the very beginning, she had saved him, which made him strive hard to protect her. Over the course of these events, a foundation of trust had naturally been formed, and now it grew ever firmer.

Chen Changsheng truly treasured this feeling of being trusted.

He took out his dagger and tightly grasped it in his hand. Taking a seat beside her, he stared out into the increasingly murky plains.

At this point, he saw the sea of grass dyed black by blood and saw the corpses of the monsters, and he got a rough picture of what had happened while he was sleeping.

He was quiet for a very long time.

The archery of the elves was truly marvelous beyond description, but... moments prior, when he had untied the longbow for her, he had noticed that the bowstring was still warm.

In this battle that he did not bear witness to, just how many times had she drawn back the bow? How many arrows had she fired? How had she been able to endure it?

Night had finally come, and the sun suspended over the edge of the plains grew even dimmer. Although it did not sink below the horizon, it cast much less light over the plains.

He sat in front of her, calmly staring at the dark grass, prepared for a battle to erupt at any time.

Time slowly passed by and that disc of light suspended at the

edge of the plains slowly made its way around the perimeter. For some reason, he could not see it anymore, but he quickly realized it was because it had been obscured by a black cloud.

Perhaps because the killings during the day had been too cruel, the monsters did not launch another attack. However, it began to rain.

The plains' climate was relatively warm, but the rain that fell from the sky was still rather chilly. With the state that he and Xu Yourong were in, if they were to get soaked, they really might come down with a severe cold.

Without even needing to think, he opened the Yellow Paper Umbrella and held it over Xu Yourong.

However, the posture was rather uncomfortable. Even if the Yellow Paper Umbrella were to be even bigger, it still would not be able to block out all the rain.

Seeing the rain wetting her dress, he did not give it any thought and immediately stood up.

The cold rain fell upon the sea of grass, countless tiny ripples interspersing its surface. It fell upon that pile of flattened grass, pervading it with chill.

He stood behind her, his left hand holding the umbrella and his right hand holding the dagger, as he gazed at the drenched and

dark world outside.

Throughout the night, he maintained this position.

From beginning to end, the monsters did not appear. With the coming of the morning, the black cloud scattered, and the azure sky once more appeared before his eyes. That disc of light at the edge of the plains gradually grew more distinct, its edges becoming sharper as the morning sun took shape. The warm rays of light gradually began to dry both the pile of grass and Chen Changsheng's clothes that had been soaked through by the rain.

Xu Yourong woke up and gazed at his pale face. She was somewhat puzzled as she thought to herself that there had been no battle last night, so why did it seem like his injuries got even worse?

Chen Changsheng did not tell her that he had spent the night holding up an umbrella for her, or that the chilly rain had soaked his back.

From the night before, they had always been either escaping or battling, one person unconscious and the other awake. This was actually the first conversation they held while they were both conscious. In the end, their interaction in the cave had been too short. Although they already deeply trusted each other, even to the extent that they faintly had a sort of mutual understanding, they realized that they were still strangers when they were both awake. It was inevitable that they felt a little estranged from each other.

Chen Changsheng remembered that scene in the Plum Garden Inn when he first met Tang Thirty-Six—that had been the first time in his entire life that he had ever met a stranger and exchanged greetings. Although in hindsight he seemed rather awkward, he had at the very least understood some basic common sense. For instance, there must always be someone to open their mouth and break the silence.

In these treacherous plains, exchanging greetings was an unacceptable waste of time, so he went straight to the point. "What do you know about these plains?"

The elves were most intimate with nature. The legends said that they could even communicate with the grass and trees, so he wanted to hear what she had to say.

Xu Yourong shook her head. "Nobody understands these plains."

Chen Changsheng said, "As long as you don't mind, could you let me choose the direction?"

Xu Yourong was somewhat confused, and asked him, "You know where to go?"

Chen Changsheng did not explain very much. "I have a rough indication of where to go."

Just as it seemed Xu Yourong was prepared to say something, she suddenly sensed a Qi that was several hundred zhang away.

It was Nanke's Qi.

Time and space in the Plains of the Unsetting Sun were somewhat strange. Although it seemed like they were separated by only several hundred zhang, in reality, they could be even farther away than that.

But she had still managed to sense it.

She said no more, indicating that she accepted Chen Changsheng's decision, but she did not get up. Chen Changsheng understood that she was still weak and her injuries were severe, so it was very difficult for her to be able to walk on her own in such a short amount of time. However, this made him question, despite obviously being in such a poor situation, how had she managed to kill so many monsters yesterday?

He turned his back towards her and said, "As long as you don't mind."

Chapter 298 - If Life Could Be Like The Moment When We First Met (Part Eleven)

Xu Yourong said, "Your face is as pale as the snow, how could I not mind?"

Chen Changsheng turned around to look at her and replied, "You're not much better. Your face is as pale as the frost on the grass."

Xu Yourong was a little at a loss and looked at her reflection in the water. Only then did she realize that her face was abnormally pale, and her hands subconsciously grabbed her cheeks.

In Chen Changsheng's eyes, the subconscious action was really cute.

"Thank you." She awoke from her daze, and then supported herself on his shoulder and leaned against his back.

"Excuse me." He placed a hand in the crook of her knees and slowly lifted her body upwards.

Just like this, they left that pile of grass. They stamped through the bloody sea of grass and left for some other, cleaner place.

The water in this sea of grass was not all that deep. At its shallowest, it did not pass the knees, whereas its deepest parts

barely reached the waist. It was just that the sludge under the water was too soft. Chen Changsheng was carrying a person on his back while his left hand had to hold up the umbrella, making walking rather difficult. Fortunately, the morning sun had already risen some time ago, and the temperature of the sea of grass had gradually grown warmer, making it extremely comfortable. While they walked through the spring water in the spring light, as far as the eye could see was soft and tender green grass. Even if it were even more difficult to wade through, it was still somewhat consoling. If it were not for those noises, then it would seem even more like they were taking a stroll in the spring.

Behind them in the plains, they could faintly hear whistling as something flew through the air. That whistling came from Nanke's two wings. Whether it was Chen Changsheng or Xu Yourong, after they had gotten a little understanding of these Plains of the Unsetting Sun, neither of them were worried that those demon experts would catch up to them quickly. Contrarily, what made them even more vigilant was the rustling noises around them. Those noises belonged to the natives of the sea of grass—yesterday, Xu Yourong had slain many monsters, but she had paid a heavy price. Simultaneously, she had also known that these plains assuredly had even stronger monsters, even existences that were beyond even Ethereal Opening cultivators.

Chen Changsheng wielded the Yellow Paper Umbrella, sensing the position of that strand of sword intent as he continued forward. The sun had almost reached high noon, but the light was not too harsh, rather it was warm and comfortable like a spring day. Xu Yourong did not understand why he had been holding on to the shabby umbrella and worriedly thought to herself, is he suffering from heatstroke? Or maybe that young cultivator's black frost Qi is in conflict with the sunlight?

If this had something to do with Snow Mountain Sect's secret cultivation method, it would naturally be difficult to talk about, but there was one matter that she absolutely had to be clear on. "Just where are we going?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "To the Sword Pool."

The sword intent pointed to a destination that, to his thinking, had a very high chance of being the legendary Sword Pool.

If the Garden of Zhou really did have a Sword Pool which had remained undiscovered despite the efforts of so many people, then it was very obvious that its most likely location was within these plains from which no one had ever emerged.

Xu Yourong understood this point, but she did not understand how he was able to be certain of the Sword Pool's location.

Chen Changsheng did not answer this question. It was not because he did not want to reveal the secrets of the Yellow Paper Umbrella to her, but rather that in the end, the Sword Pool was no ordinary treasure. Having experienced these two days and one night of escaping together, he could entrust his life to this girl and place a sufficient amount of trust in her. However, just because this was the case, was there any need to add on this gambling chip to once again test her character? Character was not something that could be tested. For each test, there was a high chance that the relationship would take one step backwards. Similarly, trust was not something that could be used. Each use of trust was to pare

away at it.

As they continued onward, the water beneath this sea of grass began to lessen and the ground began to grow more solid. Now this place was truly beginning to feel like a plain.

Walking through the dense grass and feeling his steps gradually grow more steady, Chen Changsheng began to feel much more stable. However, the beeping' sounds coming from the plains around them had also increased in number. It was clear that there were many more monsters concealed in the grass around them than there had been on the wetland. These monsters could be even more fearsome.

Xu Yourong took out the Tong Bow and calmly observed the surroundings, ready at any time to take action. Yet for some reason, as Chen Changsheng carried her for dozens of li, none of those monsters ever launched an offensive or even approached them. There were even three times where she had clearly sensed the terrifying Qi of monsters that were observing them from the distance. They had been so strong that even if she were at her peak, she would not have been their match. Why did those powerful monsters not come and kill them? If this were before, she would have thought that it was the aura emitted by her true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix directly suppressing these monsters' greed. But now she had almost none of this blood left, so what were those monsters afraid of?

The two continued to move forward. The ground grew increasingly dry, while the grass grew shorter and sparser.

Ultimately, they arrived at a patch of grass they had never walked across. This grass was ashen white, and yet it was not dead. It seemed just like an old man's hair. In the verdant plains, this short and ashen white grass was extremely striking. Moreover, it extended from under their feet to far off into the depths of the plains, forming a very obvious path.

They did not know where the path formed by the white grass went, nor what dangers were concealed there.

Xu Yourong said, "If... that person is really dead, this path most likely leads to his grave."

Chen Changsheng understood why she would make this conjecture.

In the "Essay on the Origin of the Dao", in the "Classic on the Afterlife", there was a saying: With the white grass as a path, onwards to the sea of stars.

If Zhou Dufu had really died, and his body had really been buried in this world, it was highly likely that his grave was in the depths of these plains. The White Grass Path represented a passage for the dead. There was another strong indication for this to be true. Based on the trembling of the Yellow Paper Umbrella, the strand of sword intent was far down the White Grass Path. If that sword intent indicated the position of the Sword Pool, it was extremely in accordance with their logic—the millions of swords which rested in the Sword Pool were Zhou Dufu's spoils of war. Of course, they would also serve as the finest offerings for him.

"The Garden of Zhou has no sea of stars, so the Sword Pool acts as the sea of stars." He agreed with Xu Yourong's opinion and said, "It seems that we'll have to walk to the end of this White Grass Path to know if what's at the end is death or something else."

Xu Yourong did not think that he would so quickly recognize the origin of her conclusion, so she gave him a glance of admiration.

Whether going to the sea of stars or to death, they were both very far away, so this White Grass Path was also naturally very long. Chen Changsheng walked on for a very long time, but it seemed like they had not moved a step.

The sun of the Plains of the Unsetting Sun would rise and then fall, but it would not disappear. It would make its way along the perimeter of the plains and then rise once more.

They walked and walked, and walked some more. When they were thirsty, they would drink some clear water from some puddle by the road. When they were hungry, Chen Changsheng would prepare some monster meat to eat. When they could no longer fend off sleep, he would sleep while she calmly sat on the side. When she became exhausted, he would wake up and they would switch places. Chen Changsheng's injuries improved, but she remained as feeble as ever.

On a particular day, when night fell once more—not a real night but just the light growing gloomier—rain suddenly began to fall from the sky.

Chen Changsheng carried her as he ran through the rain. At some point, she had taken up the umbrella in her hands and used it to block out the wind and rain.

The rain that night was too violent. A single umbrella was incapable of protecting them. It was just that in this flat grassland, where would they find a place to take shelter from the rain?

Just at this moment, they broke through a curtain of rain and saw a temple.

Chapter 299 - If Life Could Be Like The Moment When We First Met (Part Twelve)

It was a run-down and tiny temple, heavily eroded by the wind and rain. Only by virtue of the remaining sacrificial beasts statues on the temple eaves could one faintly make out its original style and use.

Standing before this temple cloaked in the rain, neither Chen Changsheng nor Xu Yourong said anything. It was very quiet.

This was a sacrificial temple.

With the white grass as a path, onwards to the sea of stars, a sacrifice for a thousand li.

The run-down sacrificial temple sat on the side of the White Grass Path. This indicated that their conjecture was correct. The path truly led to some sort of grave—after all, not all graves could be called mausoleums. In the past thousand years, besides the three emperors of the Great Zhou Dynasty, only one person dared to call his tomb a mausoleum and construct it in that style. To this, no one dared to object.

Of course, that person was Zhou Dufu.

"This is the legendary first sacrificial temple?" Chen Changsheng muttered to himself as he gazed at this run-down temple through the rain.

Each of the mausoleums for the three emperors of the Zhou Dynasty were vast, but each one of their first, outermost sacrificial temples, a thousand li from the mausoleum, were no more. At the risk of blaspheming the heavens, the Divine Empress had given the order for all of them to be torn down. This was because the Empress felt that these thousand li temples, besides nurturing a few ministers of Rites, had no meaning and were a massive waste.

This matter was just resolved as neatly and tidily, just like when she had sent Zhou Tong to destroy that monolith hut outside of the Mausoleum of Books. It was very reasonable, and very inarguable.

The run-down temple should be this entire continent's only first sacrificial temple.

The rain continued to fall harder and harder. The distant disc of light had long since vanished, casting the world into gloom.

Chen Changsheng stood amidst the rain while carrying Xu Yourong. For some reason, he did not enter the temple to take shelter from the rain.

In the past, there had assuredly been many human cultivators or demon experts preceding them, following the White Grass Path and finding the temple.

Afterwards, those people continued onwards towards that mausoleum.

Ultimately, they all died.

He asked, "Do you think we can turn back?"

"No, this is a path for which there is no going back." Xu Yourong shook her head.

On the previous two occasions in which Chen Changsheng was sleeping, she had used the Fated Star Plate to perform some calculations, but they presaged an extremely poor result. Although she could not calculate her own fate, his fate was as gray and dark as ever. Moreover, if they did not continue on this course and decided to turn back, they would definitely lose themselves amidst these plains.

They could only proceed forward. In that case, would they end up suffering the same fate as their predecessors?

Besides the pitter patter of the rain, there were no other sounds in front of the temple.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong's faces gradually grew calm, their eyes serene. They had regained their calm composure.

There was no question, nor was there an answer, and no looking into each other's eyes. They did not know what each other was thinking, but they both firmly believed that they would not be like their predecessors.

The rain dripped down from the eaves, splashing into flowers of water upon the shattered stone steps. Before the liquid flowers had a chance to fully bloom, they were swallowed up by even more downpour. In the temple, a bonfire burned. A wooden idol that had stood in this temple for untold many centuries had been chopped up into kindling, and as it burned, it gave off a strong, wooden scent. Chen Changsheng crouched by the fire, removing damp wood from the fire while at the same time using a candlestick holder to move around those several tuber roots in the fire.

Xu Yourong leaned against a pile of grass, her face a little pale and seeming extremely feeble. Given her injuries and the loss of her true blood, for her to hold on until now and to even emerge victorious in a few fierce battles was already a miracle.

Once the tuber roots that came from some unknown sort of grass were cooked, they began to give off a light fragrance. Chen Changsheng picked them out of the ashes, peeled off their outer skins, and then walked over to Xu Yourong. She took them and used her hands to slowly tear them apart and eat. Chen Changsheng calmly gazed at her. Even now, he did not know how she had managed to rescue him that night, as she had never made mention of it since. However, over the course of this journey, he had personally experienced how unimaginably powerful she was. He was always thinking that if it were not for him, then perhaps at the very beginning, she would have been able to easily escape.

Xu Yourong truly did not speak of that matter because she had her own pride. Moreover, she believed that since the youth of the Snow Mountain Sect had also saved her, they no longer owed each

other a debt.

She did not take too long to finish eating. Chen Changsheng handed over a wet handkerchief and began to eat his own meal afterwards.

Xu Yourong took the wet handkerchief and lightly wiped her lips. She silently gazed at him as he sat by the fire.

On the journey, for this and that reason, they had very rarely spoken to each other, but they had done many things for each other.

To live and die together, to never leave each other; these most dazzling and most connected of phrases had been easily and simply accomplished by the two of them.

May the sacred light be with you.

She said in her heart as she gazed at his two eyes that were so clear that they reflected the fire.

Then she said to him, "You are a good person."

She said this very indifferently, but very seriously.

Chen Changsheng looked back at her and chuckled. "So are you."

Suddenly, he thought of something, and said rather embarrassedly, "I'm so sorry that it took me so long to ask you. May I ask what your name is?"

Xu Yourong smiled, "And you?"

Truly interesting. These two had up to this point not even known each other's names, nor who they were.

The rain continued to fall with no indication of stopping anytime soon, and the stars could not be seen in the Garden of Zhou. Yet when he looked into her eyes, it was as if he saw the night sky in Xining Village after rain. There was not a single strand of fog or speck of dust, but because of the countless stars in the night sky, they were very bright, so bright as to cause one to be flustered, to the extent that it was simply impossible to tell lies under their watch.

Xu Yourong gazed into his eyes. The eyes were so clean and bright as to let one clearly make out their own reflection in them. Confronted by these eyes, one felt obligated to give only truthful answers.

The eyes were a window to the soul. These famous words, because they had appeared in the human world far too many times, were rarely spoken except by children just starting out on their lessons. In the vast majority of cases, people would not think of these words either, but now as they looked into each other's eyes, they both thought of this phrase.

In Wenshui City, he had not found the gazes of the encircling crowd to be enjoyable. If she knew that he was Chen Changsheng, she most likely would not have acted so indifferently and casually to him.

Since she was small, she had lived out days of attracting constant attention. Whether it was in the capital or in the south, she was the focus of everyone's gaze, the target of their admiration. She did not enjoy this lifestyle, so she also did not hope that once he knew she was Xu Yourong, he would be like the other young men, where his eyes would burn with passion and his words would become cautious and tasteless.

But when they looked into each other's eyes, they decided to give away their true identities, because this was their way of showing respect to each other.

Yet just as their mouths began to move, the moment their names were about to leave their lips, they once more... changed their minds.

Because they had an engagement that the whole world knew of. If this elven, white-clothed girl was to know that he was Chen Changsheng, she would know that he had a fiancée called Xu Yourong. On the other hand, if this disciple of Snow Mountain Sect's Secret Sect knew that she was Xu Yourong, he would know that she had a fiancé called Chen Changsheng.

They both disliked the engagement, and they both wanted to end it, but neither one wanted the other to know of it.

These emotions were very complicated. These thoughts were very simple. No matter how extraordinary they were, when all was said and done, he was a young man, and she a young woman.

So they both made an identical decision. Even after many years had passed, there was still no solution for this matter that occurred on this rain-soaked night in this run-down temple. No one knew the reasons for why they made such a decision, and they never even spoke to each other about what they were thinking that night.

Xu Yourong's smiling expression gradually dwindled, making her turn extremely placid.

Chen Changsheng's smiling expression gradually grew calm, he too not desiring to give anything away.

Their voices simultaneously rang out.

"Snow Mountain Sect, Xu Sheng."

"Elf race, Chen Chujian."

The night was quiet, with only the sound of rain falling. This sound did not vex the heart, but added to the tranquility.

In the cave when he was still not fully conscious, Chen

Changsheng had faintly heard the old freak's voice and knew that he had been mistakenly identified as a secret disciple of Snow Mountain Sect. He also knew that this girl was an elf. He did not want to reveal his identity, so he decided to hide behind this veil of subterfuge. How could he have known that Xu Yourong would think of the same thing?

Her voice was very soft, and her tongue slightly curled as that final syllable dragged off her tongue. Even if she was saying her own name, it still seemed rather awkward. When it reached his ears, his impression was that it sounded beautiful. Her voice was beautiful, her name was beautiful, that her last name was Chen was beautiful and that her name was Chujian(初见) was also beautiful. What was that phrase? If life(人生) could be like [the moment we first met](#)(初见)? When he gazed at her somewhat swollen yet still elegant face and thought about that time a few days ago where she cutely covered her cheeks with her hands, he thought to himself that if life really was just like this girl called Chujian, it would truly be good.

(TN: 初见 means "the moment we first met". The original line 人生若只如初见 means "If life could be like the moment we first met", but it is also used here to play on Xu Yourong's fake name.)

Xu Yourong's thoughts were somewhat simpler. When she first looked at this unconscious boy, she had found him to be somewhat familiar and wanted to bring his identity to light. Now that she knew his last name was Xu, she decided that it was because of this reason.

Now that they had finished exchanging names, what would they do next? The temple once again grew quiet.

"Play a round?" Xu Yourong had taken out a chessboard from somewhere and invited him to play.

As he gazed at the chessboard, he understood that she was just like him, still hiding many secrets, so he could not help but smile.

Xu Yourong also gave a wordless smile. They knew that neither of them were ordinary. Only, what need was there to discuss such uninteresting and tasteless things? If they were unable to leave this garden, what meaning did those worldly matters have? Yes, outside of life and death, besides enjoying life, nothing else was important, but what was important was...

"I don't know how to play chess," he said rather abashedly. Seeing her disappointed expression, he added, "Maybe we can play something else?"

Xu Yourong thought to herself, if we want to play dominoes, we're still lacking two people. If we want to play Yangzhou cards, we're missing even more. With just two people, other than chess, what else can we do?

In the endless night and the cold and dreary rain, it was not a good time to fall asleep, not to mention that she had gotten more than enough sleep on their way here.

Then they could only idly chat, which would let them not use up their strength and spirit.

Only right now, they were in the midst of an escape, nor were they close. Naturally, they could not talk about anything too deep, such as ‘How many people are in your family?’ ‘Are your father and mother doing well?’ ‘This year, how old are you?’ ‘How can your eyes look so beautiful?’ ‘Does your body hold the remnants of the Black Frost Dragon's bloodline?’ ‘Have you ever been married?’

This was the first time they had truly held a meaningful conversation. They were cultivators and were not too familiar with each other, so they could naturally only discuss cultivation.

The cultivation here was true cultivation, it had nothing to do with that old saying, "Life is just cultivation".

The bonfire in the temple illuminated their young faces. Right now, neither of them knew what significance the other person would play in their life.

Chapter 300 - The Geniuses' Conversation At Night And Pursuit

The atmosphere of their conversation in the run-down temple during the rainy night was very good.

Every cultivator on the long path of cultivation would stumble upon difficulties along the way, left with questions all too difficult for their present selves.. The questions were closely linked to their existences. Even their masters would find it exceedingly tough to provide an answer, and that only when a long time had been spent contemplating upon it. As for the difficulty of these questions, it actually represented the level of the cultivator from a certain perspective.

In the conversation regarding cultivation, the questions raised by Chen Changsheng were all challenging and quite high up on the totem pole in terms of level. Most of the time, Xu Yourong listened quietly, only able to contribute with a few sentences on occasion. However, every sentence was akin to a guiding bonfire at night. It was very enlightening, illuminating the world in front of him with radiant light, allowing him to see a completely new path.

This made him feel very surprised, followed by admiration shortly thereafter. Her attainment in knowledge in the aspect of cultivation was unfathomable. Although Tang Thirty-Six and Su Moyu both had extremely great talent, hers took everything to a whole new level. Amongst all the peers that he had encountered in his life, only Gou Hanshi could be compared to her, and of course, his senior Yu Ren who seemed to be incapable of cultivation.

Xu Yourong likewise began to feel admiration towards him, because the caliber and ingenuity of his thoughts and the perspective with which he viewed things were mirrored in the difficulty of his questions. She thought in her heart that in all of the cultivators of the younger generation, there was actually nobody who could compare to her other than senior Qiushan and Gou Hanshi. Even though the Snow Mountain Sect had a legacy of ten thousand years, deep inner secrets, and the fact that it had once experienced unlimited glory, it was still located in the northwest after all. It was not like the academies in the capital, nor like the Longevity Sect and the Holy Maiden Peak, which possessed the newest knowledge in the world of cultivation at any time. He actually possessed such knowledge, experience and capabilities, so he could be said to be exceptionally talented.

The cold rain outside the temple fell harder and harder, the ambient noise muffling their voices as they conversed, and the hay by the fire became warmer and warmer. The two sat leaning on the wall an inch apart, talking quietly. Once in a while, they would think silently for a moment with their eyebrows furrowed. They would be illuminated by the fire in an interesting look. Afterwards, he could articulate a certain conjecture, and she would mention another possibility.

To be able to go from being unable to cultivate to being the youngest cultivator in history to reach the upper level of Ethereal Opening in a short year, of course Chen Changsheng was a genius in cultivation, other than the fact that his master and senior had helped him establish an overly firm foundation. It must be known that it was definitely impossible to place first upon the First Banner in the Grand Examination only by relying on extensive reading and memorising of the Daoist Canons. As for Xu Yourong, her talent in cultivation was even more self-evident. It must be

known that, if viewed closely, the youngest person to reach the upper level of Ethereal Opening was not Chen Changsheng, but rather her, as she was three days younger than him.

At this moment, neither of them knew the real identity of the other, but they both became more and more certain that the opposing party was a genius in cultivation. Geniuses tended to be lonely, as they lacked people of equal level of intellect to talk to. Although this saying seemed somewhat old, it was very true. All geniuses wished that they could meet a companion, a person who could easily understand what they were talking about, allowing them to discuss about questions that could not be discussed normally. It was just like an itch on your back that had itched for many years, and then suddenly, someone helps you scratch your back, scratching the itch just right. How could it not be comfortable?

The conversation became more and more enjoyable, and even Xu Yourong, who tended to maintain her calmness, began to grow brighter and brighter in her eyes.

Until very late at night, Chen Changsheng mentioned a somewhat contradictory idea. He mentioned whether the space in the spleen could substitute the second meridian. This made Xu Yourong think hard for a very long time, and just when she thought of a possibility, she suddenly felt her shoulder become slightly heavy. Afterwards, she smelt the very faint odor of a body.

Looking at Chen Changsheng who slept soundly on her shoulder, she was slightly startled, and a sliver of slightly shameful annoyance appeared in her eyes.

She disliked being so close to men, not to mention being in such a close posture. On the way here, she was carried by Chen Changsheng, which already made her already feel extremely burdened, not to mention actually being leaned on by him.

She extended a finger, and slowly brought it to Chen Changsheng's forehead. When she was about to push him away, however, for some reason, she did not use any power.

A snore like thunder echoed through the run-down temple, which actually covered up the sound of rain outside.

Xu Yourong looked at the sleeping Chen Changsheng, and thought about how he was extremely drowsy all the time. Whenever the opportunity presented itself, he would basically fall asleep as soon as he closed his eyes, which should have been the side effects of the technique from the Snow Mountain Sect... tonight was definitely not an exception. Earlier, he should have been almost unable to stay awake, but contrary to that, he accompanied her to talk. This made her feel a little warm.

At the same time, she also felt it was somewhat shameful. This was the first time she was so close to a male.

Of course, she had already been carried on his back for several days, but... that was not on purpose. There was the reason of injury, and it was temporary... in short, she used countless ways to open herself up, to look for excuses before, but now, she could not find any excuses at all. He just leaned on her shoulder like that,

with his eyes and brows right in front of her eyes, incomparably clear.

The ladies in the small town always said stinky men, stinky men. He was not very stinky, and did not have any particular smell.

Alright, looking at the fact that you are so injured, and that I am also heavily injured, enough to be unable to move, I will let you be.

Xu Yourong thought like that, and then pulled back her finger. Afterwards, she closed her eyes, and fell asleep to the sound of the night rain. However, for a very long time, her eyelashes constantly trembled gently.

It was unknown whether it was because his snoring was too loud or some other reason.

“What a pair of adulterers.”

The rain stopped at an unknown time, and Nanke’s cold voice resounded outside the run-down temple.

With the sounds of footsteps, she walked into the temple accompanied by the Demon General couple, the zither-playing old man, and the two maids.

Her gaze shifted from the already-extinguished fire to the pile of hay on the side of the wall. Looking at the messy hay straws and the marks of being squashed by a body, it could be deduced very

easily that Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng should have slept in embrace last night.

The two maids knew that, from youth, she strictly adhered to the rules of etiquette, and viewed herself as a virtuous noble. She viewed the word 'virtuous' with unbelievable importance, so she did not feel that her current reaction was weird. The Demon General couple instead could not help but be slightly surprised, before feeling that it was slightly funny. Liu Wan'er said, "They are engaged, so how can it be considered adulterous?"

Nanke was speechless for a moment. The strength of the Demon General couple was very great, and they also were not her subordinates, so she could not punish them as she did when she punished her maids. However, she still replied confidently, "The male and female are not close. Even if they are engaged, before they marry, they must maintain distance. On the way, she let him carry her. That can be explained as being forced due to no alternative, but how can this be explained?"

Liu Wan'er smiled, but did not continue to say anything.

Since Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng had already left, the group of demon experts naturally did not stop for any longer and left after leaving the temple.

On the two sides of the White Grass Path, the grassland was filled with the Qi of monsters everywhere. Some monsters were so strong that even the Demon General couple felt slightly scared.

Although it could be said that the zither-playing old man could use his zither sounds to control a few low-level monsters, he did not have the power to control such strong monsters, not to mention the fact that the zither was currently being carried on his back and not being played at all. However, for some reason, the great monsters did not attack them, and even had a behaviour that seemed to slightly show a feeling of servitude.

This was because of the piece of black wood in Nanke's hand.

It was unknown what this black wood was, but it constantly gave out some type of message to the surrounding grasslands.

The gaze of the zither-playing old man landed on the piece of black wood. He thought about his shock a few days ago when he first saw Nanke pull out the black wood—a piece of black wood that did not seem mystical in any way could actually compel the monsters within the Plains of the Unsetting Sun to obey her instructions. Even the most powerful, and at the same time, the most prideful and brutal, monster felt slightly unsettled in the beginning, before quickly showing its servitude.

Very obviously, the piece of black wood was the most powerful tool that Military Advisor Black Robe had left for Nanke. Even Nanke had never thought that this piece of black wood would actually have such unbelievable and magical powers. Black Robe began to become more and more mysterious and great in the hearts of these demon experts. Just who was he, why did he understand the Garden of Zhou so much, and even why did he have a magical artifact that obviously belonged to the Garden of Zhou?

There were matters that they were unable to understand, and unable to ask. What the zither-playing old man did not understand was why Nanke did not use this piece of black wood and order the innumerable monsters in the grasslands to directly destroy Chen Changsheng, and instead contrarily ordered those monsters to not attack on their own accord. Just what was she thinking?

“For Master to give me this piece of black wood, he must have calculated that I might walk into this grassland. However, Master has never told me the history of this piece of black wood, showing that Master has decided in the end for me to finish them off myself. I can use the black wood to kill them, but I can also pursue a greater dream.”

Nanke gazed into the distance of the White Grass Path and did not see the two of them. However, as if she had seen them, she said indifferently, “Although I don’t understand how they did it, they obviously know where Zhou Dufu’s tomb is. They also know the location of the Sword Pool, so of course they can’t die.”

The zither-playing old man said in a low voice, “But we have already found the White Grass Path. Why leave them alive?”

Nanke said, “If we did not have them, we would never be able to find this White Grass Path in this vast grassland. At the same time, I won’t be able to confirm what ordeals that must be gone through to enter Zhou Dufu’s tomb. I will never use something that I am unconfident in to gamble for something the opposing has already gained.

The zither-playing old man understood, and no longer said anything any more. He returned to one side respectfully and submissively. Teng Xiaoming walked out to a certain area of the path, and squatted down. He closely examined the tracks left behind by Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng. He felt great respect towards Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng, and thought that, to be able to last until now, no wonder they were the most outstanding male and female in the younger generation of the humans.

Nanke raised her head and confirmed the position of the sun after the rain, before continuing onwards. Her leather boots stepped on the white grass, which was like frost, leaving behind a clear footprint. The zither-playing old man, the two demon maids, and the couple, Teng Xiaoming and Liu Wan'er, followed behind. Even more behind them, in the vast grassland, there were countless monsters that followed behind quietly like the tide sweeping over pools of water and wasteland.

The scene was so terrifying that it could be called spectacular in its own right.